



BLUE AND GRAY

WEEKLY



Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

Issued Weekly--By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1904 by Frank Tousey, 24 Union Square, New York.

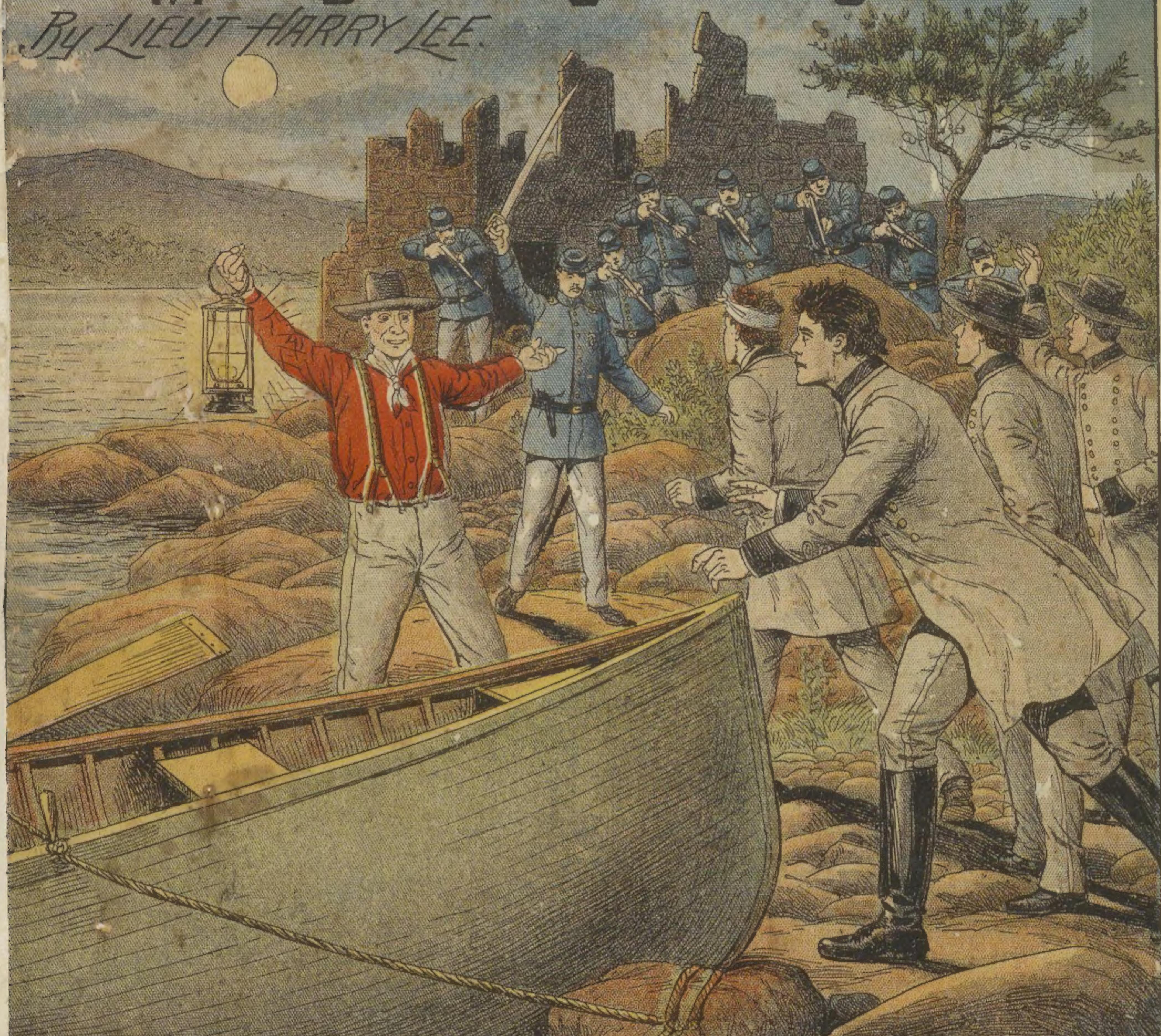
No. 12.

NEW YORK, OCTOBER 28, 1904.

Price 5 Cents.

TRAPPED BY A TRAITOR OR, THE BOYS IN GRAY IN A SCRAPE.

By LIEUT HARRY LEE.



In an instant Will Prentiss saw the hand of the traitor in it all. They were covered by the muskets of the Union soldiers. Baxter, holding up the lantern, pointed to the foe and cried "Now, save my revenge!"

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CHAPTER I.

THE AMBUSH.

Richmond was yet safe, in spite of McClellan's best efforts to carry its strong defences. The capital of the Confederacy no longer dreaded the invasion of the Union forces.

The battle of Fair Oaks, while virtually a Union victory, had nevertheless only resulted in convincing the Yankee generals that it was not an easy matter to get into Richmond, after all.

Those months of 1862, when Keyes and Casey, Heintzelman and Sumner moved their regiments across the great chess board of the war in Virginia, were indeed marked with desperate fighting and heavy loss of life.

All over the North there was great impatience. The nation had waited long for McClellan and his army to move. They believed that something should be done.

And the brave men in Gray who lay in the trenches before Richmond held their ground nobly and well. They were upon the defensive.

Down a country highway shortly after the battle of Fair Oaks there might have been seen one day a perfectly drilled

company in handsome gray uniforms marching to drum and fife.

A planter and his son drew rein and watched them pass. "Handsome company ain't they, dad?" remarked the lad. "Thar's a heap of ginger in their marchin'."

"I reckon so, son," said the planter. "It's a high-class lot of sopers that call themselves the Virginia Grays. They are all Richmond boys, an' that handsome young captain is Will Prentiss, son of Colonel Jeff Prentiss, of Beauregard's staff, but now with Lee."

"Say, dad, I'd like to jine that company an' go out to fight ther Yanks."

"Don't you git no fool notions, son. If wust comes I might hev to let ye go. But that'll be time enough."

The Virginia Grays marched on down the highway. Suddenly Captain Prentiss raised his sword and called:

"Halt! Prepare to bivouac."

In an instant the company halted and a moment later broke ranks. Nearby under a hillside was a spring of clear cold water, where they made bivouac.

Campfires were made and the Boys in Gray proceeded to make themselves as comfortable as possible.

Captain Prentiss climbed a nearby eminence with his field glass. A handsome youth wearing lieutenant's shoulder straps accompanied him.

This was his first lieutenant, Fred Randolph. When they reached the summit they had an extended view of the country.

Captain Prntiss swept the scene with his glass.

"Well, Fred," he said finally, "I see no sign of the enemy as yet. I think we might as well wait here for a while. It is a safe spot for the present, and we can ambush them readily when they come this way, as they are certain to do."

"Right, Captain Prentiss," agreed the young lieutenant. "That is by all means our best course. There is no doubt but that we shall get them all right."

"I think so."

"I am interested in Captain Bell, of the Union raiders. We attended the same school, and his sister was as lovely a young woman as one could ever hope to meet."

Captain Prentiss smiled.

"Why don't you be honest now and admit that it is Captain Roy Bell's sister Lucretia in whom you are really interested?"

"Very good," laughed Fred. "Put it that way. But it is hardly likely that I shall see her, for it is beyond reason that she will be with him."

"Oh, no! Not wholly impossible," said Will. "There have been more romantic things happened in this world. It's all right, Fred. Take no offense. I must say I admire a pretty girl myself."

The two young officers thus badgered each other, and it was only after some while that Will, suddenly using his glass, gave a mighty start.

"By Jingo!" he cried, "I plainly saw the glint of bayonets in yonder undergrowth. It is the Union men."

"What?" cried Fred eagerly. "They have come at last! Now we must lie in wait for them. Ah! I hope we will succeed in forcing them to surrender."

The Virginia Grays were still making their bivouac when Fred went rushing down and gave the order:

"Fall in, boys! There is work ahead for us. The foe is coming!"

In an instant the order was obeyed. Sergeant Joe Spotswood came up and asked:

"Where are they, lieutenant?"

"About a mile distant coming through the timber. We shall try and surprise them. I hope there will be a surrender without a serious fight."

"Humph," said the sergeant. "You needn't count on anything of that kind with Captain Bell. He is the greatest dare-devil in the Union army. He would fight if he had not a man behind him."

"Fight or no fight, he has got to be taken!" said Lieutenant Randolph. "He is the worst man in the Union army. He has done more damage with his company of raiders than any whole regiment of Yankees. He must be taken for the safety and welfare of the Confederacy."

"And we have been assigned the task of capturing him."

"And we must do it."

The Grays quickly responded to the call of their young captain. The highway passed through a cut a little way beyond.

In this cut the Grays were to wait until the Union troops should appear. Then they would spring out and attack them.

Will Prentiss had faith that it would be simply a quick fight and a surrender. He believed that he held the advantage.

The Grays took shelter in the growth of bushes on either side of the cut.

Half of the company was on one side at one end and half on the other side at the other end. As soon as the Union company was well in the cut both sides would emerge and attack front and rear.

It was necessary to plan the ambush carefully. It was already time for the Union scouts to put in an appearance as a precursor of the main body. The Grays had hardly taken up their position when these appeared.

Two men of the type of scout used by the Northern army, lank, lean woodsmen, who had followed Indian trails and could scent an enemy from afar, came up toward the cut.

Will Prentiss knew the difficulty of fooling these men.

But he had prepared a trap for them, which he now proceeded to operate. The moment the two scouts entered the cut several of the Boys in Gray emerged from bushes behind them.

When the scouts stepped into the cut it was with a wary manner and they scrutinized the road ahead.

They saw but one thing to teach them that danger was imminent. One of them halted and gave a sharp exclamation.

He bent down and examined footprints in the road.

The Grays, in marching through, of course, had left their tracks behind them. These were easily evidence of the proximity of a foe.

The two scouts saw that the footprints were fresh and that they led into the undergrowth. Almost in that instant they realized the trap.

They started up with white, scared faces and looked furtively about. They saw in that moment the guard behind them.

The boys in their rear had covered them with their muskets. A sharp, stern order went up from the bushes:

"Halt and surrender! You will be shot dead if you refuse!"

There was no help for it. The two fox-footed wary scouts were in a trap. They could only hold up their hands and say:

"We give up!"

In an instant they were under guard and prisoners. The alarm could not be given the on-coming Union troops.

Next came the vidette. Several of the advance guard passed through the cut. No effort was made to stop them.

The main body of troops was now but a half-mile behind and marching along in irregular order.

With them rode two officers, one of whom was a man of most remarkable appearance. Captain Roy Bell, the most daring raider, a man whose dash and pluck had won him fame in both armies, was a tall dark man, handsome as an

Apollo, possessed of many rare gifts and the idol of his men.

He was a born athlete, rode like a Centaur, could fight like a fiend and yet was in social life a brilliant and gifted artist! There were few accomplishments he did not possess.

So handsome and gifted was he that the Washington ladies were prone to go into raptures over him. But Captain Bell showed no preference. He was courteous and gallant to all alike.

This was the man on whose head a price had been set by the Confederacy.

And Captain Will Prentiss and his Virginia Grays were lying in wait to ambush him.

Would they succeed? Would not the brilliant and dashing young officer, as in many another case, give them the slip at the last moment?

This remained to be seen.

Up the road came the Union company. Their appearance plainly bespoke their occupation of raiders. They looked as if they had seen hard service.

Forced marches, hasty bivouacs and all sorts of weather had taken the freshness from their uniforms and the polish from their accoutrements. Some of them were hatless and some shoeless.

But they were just as hardy, just as snappy as if on dress parade and marched with the military swing that showed they had not forgotten their training.

Bell's raiders had devastated that part of the country. They were known and feared everywhere.

And they bore with them now the evidence of their occupation. Some of the men carried bags of grain and any number of barnyard fowls suspended from a pole on their shoulders. A wagon train in their rear was well loaded.

The Union raiders had no thought of attack. They reckoned that their scouts in whom they had confidence, would notify them of any danger ahead.

So it was like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky when armed men leaped into the cut before them and a stern voice shouted:

"Surrender! You are all surrounded!"

The raiders recoiled and sought to seek shelter, only to find a force in their rear. It was a critical moment.

But the trumpet voice of Captain Bell rang out with clear notes:

"Form square! Ready! Fire!"

In an instant the well-disciplined little company formed a defensive square as if to repel a charge. Then they opened fire on the foe.

When Will Prentiss saw that his summons to surrender was not heeded, he gave the order:

"Ready! Fire!"

The muskets rang out in exciting volleys. The Grays kept well back in the cover of the rail fences beside the cut.

The advantage was all with the Grays, for they fought from cover. The Union soldiers began to fall rapidly.

In their midst was Captain Bell, the saturnine and handsome, who seemed to bear a charmed life, for the bul-

lets whistled all about him. He was giving orders fast and furious.

Suddenly, just when the fire was the hottest, he sprang in front of his men and cried:

"Come on, boys! Charge!"

The Union soldiers, with a wild cheer, at once surged forward. The Grays looked serious for a moment when they saw the cold steel.

But Will Prentiss spoke in a calm even tone:

"Now, boys, you must hold them. You can do it! Steady!"

And the Grays were steady. It was all over in a minute. The Union line had come forward like a hurricane.

But the Grays poured in a volley and then Will gave the order:

"Steady, boys! Repel that charge!"

To their feet at once the Grays leaped. In another moment they were upon the wavering line of the foe.

Nothing could have been timed better than this charge. When the Grays struck the Union line they bent it back, and in another moment they were routed.

In knots of four or five they were run down and made prisoners. In this way half of them were captured.

But, in spite of all efforts, many escaped, and among them Captain Roy Bell. Will Prentiss and Fred Randolph both sprung forward to head him off.

But he leaped his horse over the rail fence, and with a large number of his men vanished in the woods.

CHAPTER II.

THE BOY RECRUIT.

Will Prentiss was not at all satisfied with the result of his work. He had ambushed the noted band of raiders just as he had planned.

But this was all. He had accomplished but little beyond the capture of a part of the band. The leader and many of his men had escaped.

It would be an easy matter for Bell to recruit his ranks and go right on the same as ever. The chagrin of the young Confederate captain was great.

He gave pursuit, but it was of no avail. The wily raider had made good his escape.

"Too bad!" said Fred Randolph. "We had him right in our hands, Will."

"Yes, but he slipped us. It will not be as easy now. We may never get him in this position again."

"We can try. Surely you won't give up."

"Certainly not," said Will. "The game is not lost yet. We will have him at any cost."

The prisoners were marched into camp under the hill-side. Will Prentiss saw that darkness was at hand and they might as well wait for daylight before making any further move.

So the Grays went back to their campfires and soon were engaged in preparing their evening meal.

In this they were fortunate, for they had captured much of the spoils which the raiders were carrying. It is enough to say that the Grays feasted well that evening.

The prisoners were placed under guard and then the Grays proposed to retire for the night.

They were tired, for they had marched far that day and when finally they were able to roll themselves up in their blankets and go to sleep they were ready to enjoy themselves.

But Will Prentiss did not at once seek slumber. He had established a distant line of pickets, for he knew the necessity of extreme caution.

The enemy were in force all about Richmond, and at any moment they might be surprised.

So Will had insisted upon a strong line of pickets. It was always his pleasure to go the rounds before retiring and this he now proceeded to do.

A guard of four accompanied him. Will found the pickets all at their post of duty and had reached the end of the round when suddenly a picket's hail came to his ears:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

In an instant the young captain turned and walked back.

"It's me, Lemuel Lumpkins. I jest want to see ther capt'in."

"Advance and give the countersign."

From the gloom came the well-knit figure of a youth. Will held up his lantern and its rays fell upon his face.

It was the same youth who with his father had stood in the cornfield a few hours before and watched the Grays pass and expressed a wish to join the brave little company.

He came forward eagerly, and there was an expression upon his honest face which showed earnestness of purpose.

The boy would have walked right up to Will, but the picket interposed his bayonet and exclaimed:

"Hold on! Give the countersign!"

"I want to see ther capt'in," said the lad. "Ain't that him right thar?"

"What do you want, boy?" asked Will. "Let him pass, picket."

The guard lowered his musket and the boy approached Will. He was all eagerness.

"Mister Capt'in," he cried, "I've got dad's consent. I kin join your company an' fight for the Confederacy. Here it is!"

The boy pulled a paper from his pocket and held it up in the lantern light. Will looked at the country youth and smiled.

Then he read the paper and smiled again. It was wonderfully plain:

"This is too scertify too all Persons Intrusted that my boy, Lemuel, bein' 18 years old and able to keer for hisself, is free from this hour and date to make his own livin' an' claim his own wages an' jine the Military if he wants too. Purvided he jines on ther Confederit Side."

"Most Respectfully, JOHN LUMPKINS."

Will read the paper and lowered his head so that the boy could not see him laugh. In all his life he had never read anything more amusing.

But he did not make use of the subject for purposes of ridicule. Indeed, he assumed an air of gravity as he faced the boy and inquired:

"Are you Lemuel Lumpkins?"

"Yes, sir. I mean capt'in."

"What is your father's business?"

"He's a planter, sir. Mostly tobacco."

"Ah! You want to enter the service?"

"Yes, sir. I mean capt'in."

"Very good, Lemuel. You look like a good strong boy. Do you know this part of Virginia well?"

"I know every foot of it, sir."

"Very good. Can you tell me the right road to Mechanicsville?"

"Yes, sir, I kin."

"Now, Lemuel," said Will in a kindly tone, "I am afraid you have very little realization of the meaning of war. It may seem a very grand thing to you to join the army and wear a gray uniform and carry a musket. But it means hardship and poor living and hard fighting."

"You must be ready to stand hard knocks and always obey orders, no matter what they may be. Don't you think you would do better to stay with your father and wait until such time as it is necessary to call you out? At any time the government may see fit to draft you. It will be time enough for you to go then. Will it not?"

The boy's face fell. But there was a dogged resolution in his manner which impressed Will.

"I would like to jine your company if you'll take me," he said. "If you won't take me I'll jine some other, but I'd rather go with you."

Will looked at the youth reflectively.

He saw that he was of the type that make good soldiers. Will would not have been a success as a recruiting officer.

He did not like to think of this youth, honest and plucky, being taken from the farm and put up on a line to stop Yankee bullets. Yet the country needed him.

Finally the boy captain said:

"Do you think you could guide us to Mechanicsville in the morning, Lemuel?"

The boy's face lit up.

"You bet I can!" he said.

"Very good," said Will. "Come up to my camp with me and I'll talk with you. Let him pass, guard."

So Lemuel Lumpkins, the farmer's boy, followed young Captain Prentiss into the lines of the Virginia Grays. He was destined to have some thrilling experiences.

When Will reached his own campfire he saw that his two lieutenants, Randolph and Walton, were rolled up in their blankets and sound asleep.

Most of the Grays were asleep also and only the guards, walking their beats, gave signs of life. Will sat down on a log by the fire and motioned to Lemuel to do the same.

There was something about the boy that interested him. So he questioned him for a time concerning his home and

his plans and his past. Lemuel answered all questions in an intelligent and clear manner.

Then Will said seriously:

"Now, my boy, have you ever considered what it means to join the army and fight for the South? Do you know that it means hours of hard drilling to become an efficient soldier? That you may go into battle and be killed? All these things you must consider seriously."

"I reckon I do, capt'in. I've read all about the big wars of Napoleon, and I've trained with our local company in Hanover, an' I kin go through ther drill pooty fairly well. As fer shootin' I kin knock ther ears off a squirrel with a rifle at fifty yards an' plug a penny at twenty-five. I ain't lookin' to be an officer yet, not by a heap! I jest want to be a private."

In spite of his best efforts, Will laughed.

"Very good, Lemuel," he said. "I believe you will do."

"Then you'll take me?" asked the boy eagerly. "I'll show ye what I kin do."

"We will give you a trial," said Will. "First, I am going to take you into service as a scout and guide. Do you understand?"

"All right, sir," said the boy slowly. "Don't I git a uniform?"

"Oh, yes, if you desire it."

"Well, I'd like one if you're willin' an' thar's any to spare."

"I think our quartermaster can rig you up," said Will. "I will see to that in the morning. Now, Lemuel, there is likely to be another fight with the Yankees before long. They want to get into Richmond the worst way, and we must keep them out. General Lee is now at the head of our army and he has sent for Stonewall Jackson, who is expected to join in a move on the enemy at Mechanicsville. We have failed in our effort to capture Bell and his raiders. Therefore we must now join Longstreet and take part in the new movement. It is my purpose to proceed to Mechanicsville by the road along the Chickahominy. Do you know this road?"

"Yes, capt'in," replied the boy. "I kin take you over that road."

"Good! That is what I want you to do. That road is crossed by many others and we would certainly lose our way."

"I kin take you through all right."

"If you do, Lemuel, you shall be made a private in 'the Grays."

"Thank ye!" said the boy with delight.

"Now, Lemuel, if you want to begin life as a soldier right here, take this blanket and roll yourself up and go to sleep. Get up instantly when you hear the drum beat in the morning."

The boy hesitated. Will saw that he had something more to say.

"Excuse me, capt'in, but I heered you speak ther name of Capt'in Bell—"

"Yes," said Will quickly. "What do you know about him?"

"Nothin' much, only there's been a young lady from the North stoppin' at our house, and she says he is her brother. Her name is Miss Lucretia."

"Lucretia Bell," exclaimed Will sharply, and he gazed at the apparently sleeping figure of Fred Randolph. To his surprise Fred arose upon his elbow.

He was wide awake. He looked at the boy and asked:

"Did you speak the name of Miss Lucretia Bell?"

Lemuel looked at Will, who nodded his head, and then he replied:

"I did, sir."

"The deuce! What do you know about her?"

"She is living at my father's house."

"Where is your father's house?"

"About three miles down the highway."

Fred looked at Will and was amazed to see that he was laughing.

"Oh, you needn't laugh," he snapped. "I am not going down there to see her. At least not at this late hour. But if I had known it at an earlier hour—"

"What a chance that is!" cried Will. "We can send our lieutenant down there and with a guard we can watch outside until Bell comes to see his sister. Then we can capture him."

"If he comes to see his sister," said the boy astutely.

"Is there any reason to doubt that he will," asked Fred.

"Oh, no, sir. He may do so. But I'm jest thinkin' of ther easiest way to git him."

Will would now have launched a question at Fred, but at that moment a dark figure came out of the gloom and into the firelight.

Will gave a mighty start.

"Joe Baxter!" he gasped.

The great stalwart woodsman smiled. For such he was, broad-shouldered and possessed of gigantic muscles.

He carried a long-barrelled rifle of the old-fashioned Kentucky style. He held out his hand and said:

"Glad to see ye, Captain Prentiss. What's ther good word?"

"Glad to see you, Baxter," cried Will. "We are flourishing. Just now we whipped Bell and his gang."

"The dickens!" exclaimed Baxter with a start. "Did ye git Bell himself?"

"That's the worst of it. He slipped us. He is like a weasel."

Baxter chuckled and rejoined:

"You bet he is. So ye got some of his men, did ye?"

"We did."

"Wall, that's pooty good. What are ye goin' to do with 'em?"

"We are going to Mechanicsville to-morrow and join Longstreet. We shall deliver our prisoners to him."

"Jest so! I'm afraid, though, ye won't see Mechanicsville."

"What do you mean?"

"I've got orders hyar from President Davis directing ye to go to Black's Ford, on the Chickahominy, an' wait there

for Colonel English, who is goin' to make a flank movement out beyond Gaines' Mill."

This was astonishing news to Will. The scout drew from his pocket the written order of the Confederate President.

It bid fair to change all the plans of the young captain. But, while he was trying to realize it all, a surprising and unexpected thing happened.

CHAPTER III.

BAXTER'S STORY.

All this while Fred Randolph had stood a silent witness. Had one seen his face they would have noted that it was cold and hard and stern.

Baxter, the scout, as he finished his declaration to Will Prentiss turned and faced Fred.

He gave a start and his face grew livid. For a moment he trembled like an aspen and clenched his hands.

"You?" he ejaculated. "What are you doin' hyar?"

"That is a good question to ask, Joe Baxter," said Fred coldly. "I am lieutenant of this company. If I were captain I would order you beyond the lines."

Baxter grinned in a sardonic way and shrugged his shoulders. He seemed to recover himself at once.

"You are not captain," he said. "My bizness is with this gentleman."

Will had been an astonished witness of all. Fred had stepped up to Baxter with clenched fists and angry mien.

"What is this, Lieutenant Randolph?" asked Will sternly. "What does this mean?"

Fred seemed to recover himself, and turning, saluted his captain.

"Pardon me, captain," he said with dignity. "I meant no harm. This is a little personal matter between Baxter and myself."

With this Fred strode away.

The boy Lemuel had shrunk back into the shadows and seemed to regard Baxter with fear and aversion. It was evident that the scout had not seen him.

Will turned to Baxter after Fred had gone and said:

"There does not seem to be very warm feeling between you and my lieutenant."

"All his fault, I kin assure ye," said the scout. "Ye see it's a leetle affair that happened some years ago in Richmond. He blamed me, but I was innocent."

"Ah," said Will stiffly. "I know Lieutenant Randolph to be a thoroughly upright young man."

"I ain't sayin' nothin' agin his character," said Baxter sullenly, "but I've got my rights. He's makin' war on me an' not me on him."

"All right," said Will in changing the subject. "Now let's go back to the first subject. President Davis gave you this order for me, did he?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's queer! How did President Davis know I was here?"

"He didn't! He knew you was somewhere lookin' fer Bell. He told me to find you."

Will's face cleared.

"Oh, I see," he said. "That is the way of it. Well, you may tell President Davis that I will report at Black's Ford at once."

"I kain't do that," said Baxter. "I've got orders to guide ye thar!"

"Oh! That is all the better," cried Will. "I am glad of that, for we have not the least idea of the proper route to take." Then, with afterthought, "but our prisoners! What of them?"

Baxter's face was a study for a moment. Then he said with sudden inspiration:

"I hev a plan!"

"What is it?"

"You don't keer whether you turn 'em over to Longstreet or to Hill, do ye?"

"Certainly not! We must turn them over to a superior command."

"Thet's all right! Thar's a brigade of Hill's men up hyar at Three Forks, not more than nine miles. If ye will give me a guard of five men I'll guarantee to deliver 'em to thet brigade an' they kin then be sent further along the line and into Richmond. I'll be back before daylight."

Will caught at the idea.

"That is all right," he cried. "You shall have the guard and you may start at once. But be back at dawn, Baxter, for we must start at once for Black's Ford."

"Give yer order, capt'in," said the scout. "March out the prisoners!"

Will instantly called Sergeant Spotswood and said:

"Sergeant, detail five men as guards to the file of prisoners. March the prisoners out with the detail and turn the command over to Baxter here."

Spotswood saluted and said:

"All right, sir."

He departed to execute the errand. Just then Baxter turned and saw the boy Lemuel Lumpkins cowering in the shadows.

"Who's thet?" he exclaimed, staring at Lemuel. "Who hev ye here, capt'in. Great Caesar! What did you let that boy into your lines fer? He's thick with the Yankees and will give away everything about yer camp to the enemy."

Will was astounded. He turned and looked at Lemuel sharply. In an instant the boy's athletic figure straightened. He sprung out.

"You're a liar!" he cried hotly.

"What?" roared Baxter, making a rush at the lad. "I'll kill ye fer that. Don't ye dare ter give me the lie."

The boy dodged, but Baxter caught him by the arm. In an instant a knife flashed in his hand.

There might have ensued a tragedy but for prompt work on Will's part. He sprung forward and caught the scout's wrist.

"Hold on, Baxter!" he cried sternly. "Don't harm that boy!"

The scout relaxed his hold on Lemuel and turned with a scowling face.

"What is he to you?" he demanded.

"It don't matter, sir. I don't want you to harm him!"

"All right," snarled Baxter. "I can tell ye he is a snake. He'll lead ye into trouble. Don't ye believe a word he says. Thar's a Union officer at his house now. He an' his father are traitors to ther Confederacy."

Will gave a start. He remembered now that Lemuel had said that Bell was at his father's house.

Was Baxter right?

"It's a lie!" cried the boy. "Bell and his raiders come there and compelled father to keep them. We can't help it."

Will knew that this was logical. In fact the raiders often quartered themselves upon the farmers of the region.

But he knew that Baxter was one of the most trusted scouts in the Confederacy. A resolution seized him.

"You may retire for a moment, Lemuel," he said. "Now, Baxter, I want it understood that you are to take the prisoners to General Longstreet or General Hill."

"I will, sir," replied Baxter, saluting. "Ah, here is our man now."

It was Joe Spotswood, who saluted and said:

"The detail is ready, captain. The prisoners are in line."

"All is ready, Baxter," said Will. "You are in command. Report to me as early in the morning as you can."

"All right, captain."

Baxter saluted and went away with Spotswood. Will stood a moment in thought until he felt a touch on his arm. He turned and saw Lemuel looking at him with white, eager face.

"Oh, sir. You are not going to trust that man, are you?" he asked. "Don't ye do it, cap'tin. He is a bad man!"

"You surprise me, Lemuel. He is a trusted scout and spy. What do you know about him that is bad?"

"My dad kin tell ye! We all know that he killed Bill Perkins, though we can't prove it."

"He tells just as hard a story about you and your father, Lemuel."

There was an expression of pain and disappointment on the boy's face. He turned away, saying:

"If he is goin' to be in this company I don't want to jine it. I'm going back home."

"Not yet, Lemuel," said Will in a sharp voice. "You will remain here for a time. I think, to make sure, I will place you under arrest. Corporal Payton!"

Corporal Sam Payton sprung up from his blanket and rushed forward. He saluted and then began to dig the sleep from his eyes.

"Corporal," said Will sternly, "place this boy under arrest. Hold him closely under guard."

"All right, sir."

Lemuel said nothing. He hung his head as if in shame and allowed himself to be led away.

Just then Fred Randolph reappeared. He glanced at Lemuel and asked:

"What's this? What has the boy been doing?"

"I have a reason fer keeping him in the lines just at present," said Will. "Take him away, Payton."

Then he turned to Fred and said:

"You and Baxter are not friends!"

"I must say we are not," replied Fred. "And there is a good reason for it."

"What is the reason? Do you care to tell it?"

"I have no reason for concealing it," said Fred. "Some years ago, when my father was in business in Richmond, this man Baxter was in his employ. I was quite young then and knew little about the world. But I soon discovered that Baxter was a villain. My father's safe was rifled of several thousand dollars and his warehouse burned. I put the police onto evidence which convicted Baxter, and I helped to run him down. He was forced to refund the money and he served a short term in prison. He swore revenge upon me then, and you may be sure he will try to wreak it upon me if he can."

"I am shocked!" exclaimed Will. "Baxter is one of the most trusted spies in the Confederacy."

"I can't help that. He is a villain."

"Was this evidence conclusive against him?"

"Well, I will admit it was circumstantial, but he was guilty all right."

"Still there was a doubt."

"Not in my mind."

Will nodded slowly.

"I am sorry, Fred," he said. "I am compelled to place confidence in this man. He is to be our guide to Black's Ford. President Davis has sent him."

"He may be loyal in his present duties," said Fred, "but I wouldn't trust him outside, you may be sure."

It was plain that the young captain was not disposed to treat Fred's story with any great degree of credulity.

But he said:

"While he is with us refrain from any personal encounter with him, Fred."

"I shall not trouble him unless he troubles me."

"Very good! We will let it rest at that. Now, Fred, I want you to take a detail of a dozen men and go down to the farmhouse of John Lumpkins and see if Bell is hiding there."

Fred saluted and replied:

"Your orders shall be obeyed."

"Return as early as you can."

"Yes, sir."

Then Will Prentiss, captain of the Virginia Grays, rolled himself up in his blanket and slept. The events of the morrow were to be strenuous and he would need rest.

Fred Randolph quickly called out a guard of twelve men. Corporal Sam Payton had charge of them.

The boy Lemuel begged permission to go with them. But as Will had given orders to the contrary this was not possible.

Down the road in the darkness went the little guard of Grays and their brave young lieutenant.

They passed the picket line and were soon on the road to the Lumpkins' farm. They marched on under the starlit sky.

They knew not what the expedition might bring forth.

They knew not if it might be a success. Perhaps they were walking into a trap. There might be a hundred of Bell's raiders secreted about the Lumpkins' house.

But that did not signify.

They had been ordered by their young captain to go thither. They would not turn back, no matter what the risk.

It was not long before the lights of the Lumpkin farmhouse twinkled before them. Fred walked in advance of his men.

He turned and spoke a few cautious words of command.

"March as silently as possible," he said. "Take no chances. We don't want to walk into a trap."

Nearer they drew cautiously to the farmhouse. In a few moments more they had reached the little white paling in front of the house.

There was a gate in this. Fred gave whispered orders to his men to remain within call.

Then he walked up the little walk to the house. The porch was deserted at that hour. But the inmates of the house had not retired.

This was evidenced by the light which shone through a window. Fred did not apply at the door.

Instead, he crept up to the window and glanced in. The sight he beheld was one which gave him a start.

The room was well furnished after the manner of farmhouses. At a small piano sat the only occupant.

This was a young girl, as beautiful as a dream. Her features were regular and her wealth of light hair fell down her back.

She was singing softly a pretty ballad. Her voice seemed to enthrall the young Confederate lieutenant.

Fred Randolph was a Southern youth of high breeding and somewhat given to romantic tastes.

This was a trait by no means to be disparaged, for it led to high ideals. Fred was especially susceptible to feminine graces.

In his eyes at that moment Lucretia Bell, the pretty Yankee girl, was a divinity. He worshipped at her shrine. In a moment forgotten was all else.

The mission which had brought him to the farmhouse completely slipped his mind. This was no usual occurrence, for Fred was zealous in duty.

The window was of the long kind which opened out upon the porch. He pressed it and it yielded to his touch, swinging inward.

"Pardon me!"

The young girl sprung up from the piano and turned like a flash. For an instant fear and alarm had shone upon her face.

But, with that one glance, her manner changed. An eager smile came into her eyes and she stepped forward:

"Lieutenant Randolph! This is indeed a pleasure, as well as a great surprise."

Fred bowed low like a gallant courtier.

CHAPTER IV.

ENTRAPPED.

"Pardon the intrusion," he said. "But I could not resist the impulse to enter. I saw you at the piano—"

"Why should you not enter? Are we not old friends?" she cried, placing a soft hand on his arm and giving him a glance which made his veins tingle. Alas for the young lieutenant of the Virginia Grays.

"I came here—" he paused as a sudden recollection of his mission came to him. He suddenly realized what he had done. "Pardon me," he stammered, "I am doing wrong. I must go!"

Lucretia Bell was a girl of great gifts of perspicacity. In an instant she was between him and the window,

"No," she cried. "You must not go. This is shabby treatment of a friend. You will at least tell me what brought you here? Was it really to see me?"

Fred winced. His face was scarlet and he was trembling like an aspen.

Could he tell her that he had come to entrap her brother, who would upon capture be shot as a guerrilla? He felt sick and faint for a moment.

"I—I was going by," he said. "I saw a light in the window. Your voice—"

"I am glad to know that," she cried with a joyful laugh. "You know that my dear brother, who is all I have in the world, is sought for by your soldiers. There is a price upon his head. I feared you had come to capture him. But I know you would not so far forget our friendship as to do me that harm."

"I—I—" stammered Fred, upon whom, like an avalanche, the consciousness of deception had fallen. "I must tell you, Lucretia—"

He paused. His tongue would not for a moment utter the words. She stood before him, so guileless, so apparently trusting, that he felt reproach. No, he could not deceive her.

"Lucretia," he said suddenly with firm resolution, "I can't lie to you. I have come upon that very errand."

She drew back a moment coldly and looked at him. Surely no young girl could have looked upon Fred Randolph, handsome and noble, at that moment without a thrill of admiration. But a subtle light burned in her eyes.

"I am sorry," she said in a low tone. "It is one of the penalties of war. Oh, Fred, if you were only one of us. If it could be otherwise!"

"It cannot," said the young lieutenant. "I am loyal to our cause."

"Yes," she said. "I respect you for that. But my brother is very dear to me. I cannot give him up to you."

"I respect your sentiment," said Fred. "But if he is here, I must take him away as a prisoner."

"He is not here."

He looked into her eyes and believed he read the truth. Strange to say, he seemed to experience a sense of joy that Captain Roy Bell was absent.

"Then I am spared that painful duty," he said.

"Yes," she said. "And I can see by your eyes that you are not sorry." She laughed lightly.

"Yes," admitted Fred.

"It will never be possible to capture Captain Bell," she rejoined. "He is too wary. He is a fox. So give no more thought to the matter for the present. Come! Let us talk of those good times before the war."

Fred Randolph would have been less than human had he not yielded. He was resolved to spend but a brief while with this beautiful siren. But the minutes were reduced to seconds as he tarried.

She chatted and sang. Once she left the room and brought back rich old Southern wine. Fred was enthralled by her winsome entertainment.

Time and again he half rose to go. Each time she restrained him. Finally she leaned forward and said:

"You are not easy, Fred. I must not keep you longer."

He instantly rose.

"I will say that no other power could have kept me here this long," he said. "I have been richly entertained. When the war is over, Lucretia——"

"You will forget me?"

"Never!"

He caught her hand in his. She laughed and drew back.

"Stop!" she said. "Tell me! You have men outside."

He hesitated, but replied:

"I have a guard of a dozen men at the gate."

She nodded. Then she cast a furtive glance at the window.

"Do not go out that way," she said. "Follow me!"

Fred yielded and followed her out of the room. In the next room before a cheery fire sat Planter Lumpkins and his wife, the father and mother of the boy Lemuel.

Lucretia spoke a few words of introduction and said:

"I am a Union girl, but you see I have friends in the Confederate service. Lieutenant Randolph and myself were school friends."

Mr. Lumpkins bowed and said:

"If all ther Northerners were like you, Miss Bell, we'd never have gone to war."

"I believe you," cried Fred gallantly.

At this Lucretia laughed in what seemed immoderate fashion. She led the way to a door which opened upon the opposite side of the house to that by which Fred had entered.

It was dark outside. The flash of light from the open door showed a paved walk. The young girl leaned out of the doorway and said:

"This walk will lead you right around to the gate where you left your men. Good-night, Fred! Call again!"

"Good-night!" he said. And then the door closed. He stood in utter darkness.

He waited for his eyes to become accustomed to the gloom. All the while he wondered at the abrupt closing of the door by Lucretia.

But presently he started to feel his way along the walk. It led away from the house between a row of cedars.

Fred kept on for a little ways. He had half made up his mind to return and take a more direct route around the house when a startling thing happened.

Some heavy body was launched at him out of the gloom.

He felt something clapped over his face. He made a convulsive leap forward and grappled with a swarm of figures.

The blanket thrown over his head stifled his cries. The odds were against him and he was borne to the ground.

In a trice he was gagged and bound. He was a helpless prisoner.

He was carried away for some distance and then placed on a horse. For a long while he galloped in the midst of a cavalcade.

Who his captors were he did not know. But he guessed that they were no others than the Union raiders.

A horrible thought came to him. Was this the work of Lucretia? Had she sent him into a trap?

He could not believe her so treacherous. He could see nothing in her that would indicate such perfidy.

He must have been seen to enter the house by the foe. They had not been strong enough in numbers to attack his guard. But they had skilfully entrapped him.

It is needless to say that Fred was intensely chagrined.

He thought of his comrades in camp. He wondered what Captain Prentiss would say or think when he failed to return.

After a while the riders came to a halt. Fred was blinded a moment by a light when the blanket was removed from his head. He saw that it was the light of a campfire.

About this were reclining the figures of men in blue. Horses were coralled in the gloom beyond.

He saw the glint of water beyond the firelight. All this he saw, but in the foreground was something of greater interest.

A tall Apollo-like figure loomed over him. He saw a handsome saturnine face, and a smile upon it that gave it a Mephistophelian appearance.

Captain Bell, the raider, was bending over him.

"Ah, it's the young lieutenant of the Grays," he said. "I wish it was the captain. Well, my good man, do you know where you are?"

"You are Captain Bell," said Fred boldly. "I have been entrapped."

"That is right," said the raider with a nod. "You are a prisoner. Now, you look like an interesting young man. I would like to promote your career, but I can hardly go so strongly against my own interests. So I must hang you!"

"Hang me!" exclaimed Fred. "That is not warfare. I am not a spy or guerrilla."

"Perhaps not. But if your captain caught me, he would hang me!"

"You are a guerrilla!"

Bell laughed in a ringing way.

"You draw a fine distinction," he said. "But never mind. I shall not hang you to-night. Put him under guard, boys."

So Lieutenant Randolph, of the Virginia Grays, found himself a prisoner in the hands of his most dreaded foe. He wondered what the outcome would be.

He was given a blanket like the others in which to roll himself and sleep on the ground. But he did not sleep.

The more he sifted the matter the harder it was for him to decide whether Lucretia Bell had been a traitor to him or not.

Then he reflected that his mission there had furnished her sufficient incentive. He had gone there to entrap her brother.

In turn he had been entrapped himself. If Lucretia was in the game he gave her credit for being a shrewd young woman.

While Fred lay there he noticed that nearly all in the encampment had sought the shelter of their blankets.

Even the guard who was to keep watch over him had seated himself upon a stump and was nodding drowsily.

Fred lay near the fire. But below him was a slope leading down to the waters of a creek.

As he lay there he saw a picket pass and repass along his beat on the banks of the creek. Suddenly a startling idea came to the young lieutenant.

Beyond the firelight all was gloom. Why could he not roll out of his blanket silently into the gloom and then roll quietly down the hill and into the water?

If he could time it so that he would reach the water by the time the picket had passed beyond that point he might swim out far enough to get beyond the range of vision.

No sooner had Fred conceived this plan than he hastened to execute it.

He cautiously rolled out of his blanket while the guard was looking the other way. He left the blanket rolled up in such a way that it still looked as if a human figure was in it.

A moment more and Fred had rolled beyond the firelight.

He could not believe his good luck. But upon one thing he was resolved.

If he was discovered now he would never be retaken. He would sacrifice his life first. So he moved with confidence.

Down the descent he crept. He was now almost upon the picket guard. The guard passed slowly along.

He did not notice the dark figure lying in the gloom. Fred held his breath until he had passed. Then he rolled silently down to the water's edge.

He did not enter the water. In the deepest part he lay he gained his feet and crept along for some way.

When he was sure that he was beyond the bearing of the pickets he struck out at full speed.

He did not know where he was, but he went on at random. It seemed as if he would never find a road.

But finally he came into a highway. He followed it in the early morning light till he came to a guide board.

This directed the traveller to Mechanicsville. Fred knew that his company had been ordered thither.

He hoped that it was a move for the better. He set out along the highway for Mechanicsville.

Fred knew there was going to be a battle in that vicinity. He was anxious to get back to his company. His move toward entrapping Captain Bell had been as usual a failure.

He kept on along the highway until suddenly he came to a fork. Here was another guide board.

Fred lit a match and scanned it. He read the inscription:

"Black's Ford! Four miles!"

For a time the young lieutenant hesitated. Then he took the road to Black's Ford.

CHAPTER V.

BEHIND THE STUMP FENCE.

The failure of Fred Randolph to return from his expedition caused Will Prentiss some anxiety.

When morning broke and he had not returned the boy captain took active steps to make an investigation. He ordered the Grays to break camp and it was his purpose to go in quest of the young lieutenant.

But just then Spotswood and the guard came into camp. They had a strange story to tell.

They had waited at the gate for over an hour for Fred to return. Then the sergeant became convinced that there was something wrong.

He decided to act and at once entered the house. He found Mr. and Mrs. Lumpkins and Miss Lucretia Bell had retired. They all acknowledged that Fred had been in the house, but had gone some time before.

His disappearance was a mystery.

The plucky sergeant was determined to unearth it. He searched the vicinity and used every method in his power, but in vain to unearth the mystery.

Finally at break of day they returned. The fate of Lieutenant Randolph was unknown.

To add to all this, suddenly Baxter, the spy, came into camp.

He was in a dilapidated condition. His clothes were torn and he was spattered with mud and blood. But he was physically intact.

The story he told was a thrilling one.

"About five miles out on the road," he said, "we wuz ambushed by a Union regiment. They shot down the guard and I set these prisoners all free. I just escaped by the skin of my teeth."

Will was much cheered by this reverse. Five of his men had thus lost their lives.

He could bring no charge of carelessness or treachery against Baxter. The scout told a straightforward story.

There was no time to spare now. It was necessary in obedience of orders for the Grays to proceed with all speed to Black's Ford, on the Chickahominy River.

Baxter appeared to be much dejected and spiritless.

But it was necessary to get under way at once.

Camp was broken and Will gave the order to march. Down the highway once again marched the Grays.

Lemuel Lumpkins had been forgotten by Captain Prentiss in the general excitement. Now, however, he marched in the rear of the company with a guard on either side.

The day opened dull and cloudy. There were mutterings of thunder which indicated an electric storm.

The Grays kept up their step for miles. They were rapidly nearing the Chickahominy.

Thus far there was visible but little signs of the enemy.

Far off to the south and near the banks of the James heavy firing was heard. It was evident that some forces were engaged in that locality.

Occasionally guns were heard in other directions. The advance on Richmond thus far, however, had not met with great success.

General Lee still held the invaders back. Richmond was yet safe.

It was not until the Grays were within a few miles of Black's Ford that any sign of the enemy was seen.

Then the videttes were fired upon from ambush. A heavy cornfield at one side of the road seemed to hold a legion of Union infantry.

In face of so largely superior a force Will drew back and took the defensive. He selected the best possible spot to make a stand.

For the foe were coming to the attack. With apparent arrogance and full confidence they were evidently bound to wipe the little company of Grays off the earth.

In a comparatively short space, however, Will had thrown his line behind an irregular stump fence. This crossed a little hillside and skirted a meadow.

The Grays dragged these stumps up and made a breast-work of them. A better defence could not have been devised.

It would stop the bullets and at the same time the apertures furnished good loopholes for the Grays to fire through.

The Union infantry were deployed in a manner which showed a master hand. Their movement was by the flank.

But Will could easily swing his small company about so as to be always facing the enemy. The stumps were piled up so as to almost encircle them.

Fortunately the Union soldiers had no artillery. The Grays could not be shelled out of their position. This made the conflict more of an even thing.

For some while the fire was hot and it was hard to say which side had the best of it.

Three of the Grays were killed and a dozen or so wounded. On the Union side the losses amounted to greater, for they were more exposed.

Throughout the field Baxter kept in constant alarm. He seemed to be much troubled by the situation.

When Will chanced upon him in going around the defiles Baxter motioned to him to stop and said:

"I say, captain, it looks sort of hopeless, don't it? We're in a bad place."

"Oh, I don't know," said Will. "We are holding our own. They don't dare to make a charge."

"But ye see they hev more men. Then they will likely be reinforced."

"What of that?"

"Why, they'll wipe ye out. I think if it was me, I'd surrender before half my men were killed off."

Will was astounded.

"Surrender!" he exclaimed. "You are crazy, Baxter. We have as good a chance as they. We may be reinforced. Colonel English is probably at Black's Ford by this time."

Baxter shrugged his shoulders.

"We won't get to Black's Ford," he said significantly. "I don't believe Jeff Davis knew what he was doing when he ordered ye there. You bet English will never get there either."

"Indeed! You seem very positive in this matter, Baxter," said Will searchingly. "Where do you get your information?"

"Anybody kin see it with half an eye," said the scout sullenly.

For the first time a real thrill of suspicion of the fellow crossed Will's mind. He was half tempted to order his arrest. But he was not yet sure enough of his dishonesty or treachery.

Just then Will was called away by a new development in the fight. He left Baxter by an opening in the stump fence.

The Union soldiers had made a move forward, and Will saw the glitter of bayonets and knew that they meant to make a charge.

At once he called all the Grays to that point and preparations were made to repel the attack.

This was accomplished none too soon. A great cheer went up as the blue line came up through the bushes.

"Steady, boys!" called Will. "Hold them off! Ready! Fire!"

A line of flame leaped from the stump fence. The blue line did not waver. On it came irresistibly.

Again a deadly volley poured forth. This time the blue line wavered. But the Union officers held them to their work.

They came right up to the fence. The Grays were loading and firing as fast as they could.

But it was the stump fence alone which saved the little company of Confederates.

When the foe reached it they were held. It was impossible to get through it. To climb over it was not easy, and they were shot down in the act.

The result was a repulse.

The line of blue went plunging back. In less than ten minutes the affair was all over.

The Union troops had retired in complete disorder, and the air was all singing birds. The Grays were overjoyed at their good fortune.

They made the air ring with cheers. Baxter, who had taken no part in the fight, looked crestfallen and surprised.

"Well, Joe," said Will as he approached the spy, "what do you think of it now? Do you think we ought to surrender?"

"I must say that ye did well," said the scout. "But I'm afeard ye hain't seen ther last of it."

"All right!" cried the boy captain. "Let 'em come on again. I think we can hold them all right."

Just then a soldier came up and touched his cap.

"Captain Prentiss," he said, "the boy who is under arrest over there wants to see you very much."

Will gave a great start. He had quite forgotten about Lemuel. He said quickly:

"Is that so? It isn't necessary to keep him under guard longer. Let him go!"

"What's that?" cried Baxter, who had heard the remarks. "Let that young cub go free? Don't yer do it, Captain Prentiss! He's a spy an' a traitor!"

"He can't harm us now," said Will decidedly. "In fact I doubt very much the charge against him."

"An' you'll let him go?" asked Baxter.

"I certainly shall."

The scout turned and walked away without another word. Will now approached Lemuel.

"Well, my boy," he said, "have you decided to go back to the farm as the best place after all?"

"No, sir," replied Lemuel firmly. "Not if you'll take me into your company. If you don't I'm goin' ter enlist in some other company. I'm goin' ter fight in this war an' you bet I will."

The young captain laughed at the boy's earnestness. There was no doubt of his good faith.

Will could not believe the intimations of Baxter regarding the boy's disloyalty. The fact that Captain Bell and his raiders saw fit to make a rendezvous at his father's house did not change his impression.

"The boy is all right," he muttered. "If there is any one to suspect it is Baxter. I wish I knew where Fred was. He could clear up much if he were here."

Lemuel was overjoyed when he learned that he was no longer under arrest.

He was still further pleased when Will said:

"Lemuel, I am going to take you into the Grays. You can apply to Sergeant Spotswood at once for a uniform and your name shall be put on the roll of the company."

"Hooray!" shouted the boy. "I'll show ye what I kin do. Mebbe I'll git to be a captain myself some day."

"It is only a question of faithful service," said Will. "I believe you have the right stuff in you, Lemuel."

Will had taken a fancy to the boy.

"If I do I'll owe it to you, Captain Prentiss," he cried. Then he stopped as he saw the gaze of Baxter fixed upon him. The boy gazed at the scout much with the fascination one has for a serpent.

Baxter scowled and then walked up to Will and said:

"The boy kin guide you all right to Black's Ford. I'm goin' back to report to President Davis."

"See here, Baxter," said Will sharply, "what have you got against this boy?"

"Nuthin' much!" replied the scout in a terse way. "I only know that his father keeps Yankee boarders, that's all. I wouldn't trust any of the tribe."

"That ain't so, Joe Baxter," cried Lemuel hotly. "Captain Bell stops there because if father didn't take him in he'd burn the house down and raid the place."

"Humph," said the scout, "you have the warnin', Captain Prentiss! Look out!"

"He might look out for you," cried Lemuel. "I'll tell now how I saw ye ridin' over the Three Forks road with a couple of Union officers a while ago, and ye warn't a prisoner either."

Baxter flamed red and a savage imprecation escaped him. He sprung at the boy madly.

But Will's sword flew out and was passed before him.

"Halt!" he thundered.

The scout stopped and fell back. He glared at Will a moment and then gritted:

"You can stand fer that little reptile an' believe everything he says. But he'll lead ye into trouble, and ye kin mark my word on it."

With this Baxter walked away. He was soon beyond the lines, and it seemed certain that he would keep his promise to return and report to President Davis.

Will was really not sorry when he disappeared from sight. From the bottom of his heart he disliked and distrusted the fellow.

Lemuel removed his cap and stepped forward in an earnest manner:

"Captain Prentiss, I hope ye won't believe what he has said agin me. It ain't true. If that is a traitor to be found it's Joe Baxter hisself. I kin take you to Black's Ford just as safely as he kin, and I'm under orders to you, sir!"

CHAPTER VI.

AT BLACK'S FORD.

"Very good, Lemuel!" cried Will. "Spoken like a man! I'll certainly trust you. Now report to Sergeant

Spotswood for a uniform. If the enemy draws off, we will march on once more."

This was just what the Union troops had done. It was evident that they had decided not to renew the attack while the Confederates retained their present position.

Whether they meant to retreat and once again attack in a more favorable position Will did not know.

Nor did he care. He must push on to the ford. He would find Colonel English and his regiment there for reinforcement.

So he had no further fear. He sent out videttes who soon returned to report that the foe had retired some distance into the interior and seemed in full retreat.

The road to Black's was, therefore, apparently open. At once Will called the Grays into marching line.

Lemuel now had donned a uniform and he made a handsome soldier boy.

Of course he would need to be drilled and instructed. But this would be an easy matter, as he claimed to have some experience.

Now that Baxter had gone Will decided to make Lemuel the guide. The boy declared that he knew the road to Black's Ford well.

So the Grays left their stump fence fortress and pushed on once more. Young Captain Prentiss little dreamed of the terrible scrape into which they had already been drawn.

Time was to inform him of this. The Grays marched on with all possible speed.

As they neared the bottom lands of the Chickahominy the forest closed in upon them. But after several miles of this sort of country, the ground began to rise with an oak growth and rocky soil.

There were great ledges and croppings of rock. Over these the fern and moss grew in profusion.

Black's Ford was at a point on the Chickahominy, where the river ran for a distance between rocky banks. Suddenly one of the videttes came back with startling information.

"The enemy are in force in front," he said. "I don't think it safe to go further."

Will knit his brows.

"That is queer," he muttered. "How does it happen that there are so many Union soldiers in this vicinity, where Colonel English, with our men, are supposed to be in force?"

He did not like the situation. He turned to Lemuel and asked:

"What is the road ahead of us?"

"It is rocky an' forests are ahead," replied the venturesome lad.

"Oh, this is the direct road to the ford?"

"This is the main highway, sir," said Lemuel, "but there are other roads. I know a way to get to Black's so that the enemy will never know it."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Where is the road?"

"We must turn back half a mile and take a woods road to the right. It will lead us by a circuitous route to the ford. It is through a region little known, and no stranger could find the way."

"There you are!" cried Will. "That is the road for us to take. Face your men about, Sergeant Spotswood. Lieutenant Walton, you will fall in behind the guide! March."

The evolution was quickly performed and the boys were once more on the march. Back they went to the junction of the woods road.

As they turned into it, suddenly a loud shout caused Will to turn his head.

"Great Cæsar!" he exclaimed. "It is Fred, safe and well!"

Out of the undergrowth burst the young lieutenant. He rushed up to Will and fairly embraced him.

The Grays cheered and there was much excitement and rejoicing. It might be said that Fred Randolph was the most delighted of all.

"But tell us," cried Will, "where have you been? What happened to you?"

Fred grew a bit red and stammered:

"Well, I must out with it. I went down to the Lumpkins' house as you ordered. I left Spotswood and the men at the gate. I looked in through the window and saw Lucretia Bell at the piano."

"Oh," said Will, with a comprehensive smile, "I begin to understand."

"Now, hold on, old pard," said Fred, testily. "No funny remarks. I have had a very thrilling experience and I am lucky to be here at this moment to tell you of it."

"Very good! Go on!"

"Well, I found the window would open, so I stepped into the house. Miss Bell was quite surprised to meet me. I told her plainly that I had come to look for her brother. I found he was not there."

"Did she tell you that?"

"She did."

"Oh, I see, and you took her word?"

Fred colored and grew hot.

"Miss Bell is a very honorable young woman," he began.

"Wait a moment," said Fred. "You must remember that her brother's life was in jeopardy at the moment."

Fred felt uncomfortable.

"I am sorry that you have such an opinion of Miss Bell," he said, "I will go on."

"Do so."

"Here is where I did wrong. I lingered and chatted with Miss Bell. When I arose to go she showed me out a door on the other side of the house. I stepped out into the darkness. In passing down the walk I was seized by a number of men, blindfolded and bound. I was put on a horse's back and carried miles through the woods."

"When they took the blindfold from me I was in the raiders' camp. Captain Bell stood before me!"

"Whew!" exclaimed Will in amazement, "then you were Bell's prisoner!"

"Yes, I was in his hands. You can know what that would mean."

"I should say so. What next?"

"He told me that I would be hung in the morning. I rolled in a blanket and was placed under guard for the night. Good fortune was with me. The guard slept and I rolled down the embankment in the darkness and escaped. I have been wandering about ever since and came upon you by chance."

"You did well," cried Will, heartily. "I am glad you got safely back. I want to tell you that I have parted company with Baxter."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Fred. "Did you have trouble with him?"

"Not exactly! But I can't just say that I trust him. He is to my belief a treacherous scoundrel."

"You have my mind exactly!" cried Fred. "You may know that we are far from being friends. My opinion of the fellow is decidedly poor."

"Well, he took his leave because I chose to take Lemuel into the Grays. He was very bitter against the boy."

"So I perceived. What could be his reason?"

"I do not know. Lemuel declares him to be a traitor, and Baxter declares the boy to be the same. Of the two, I am inclined to believe the boy!"

"You are right!" cried Fred. "I feel sure he is honest and true."

"Well," said Will, "he is our guide at present and we are on our way to the ford. We ought to be there now. Doubtless Colonel English is waiting anxiously for us."

"I lost my sword in that little affair last night," said Fred.

"I have a spare one," said Will. "Now you may take charge of the boys and let us press forward as rapidly as possible."

Down the old road through the woods now went the Grays.

They marched in lines of four abreast with loaded muskets and bayonets fixed for they knew not at what moment they might be attacked.

On they marched and it seemed as if there was no end to the woods road. Suddenly one of the scouts came in.

"No use!" he said. "Ye can't go no further. The enemy are in force in front."

Will turned to Lemuel. "How is that?" he asked.

The boy seemed dumbfounded.

"It's a heap strange," he said. "I don't see how it can be. How did they ever get in here? I'll tell ye! It's Baxter's work!"

The boy shouted this with earnest conviction. It astonished all who heard it. The accusation was a direct one.

"Baxter!" exclaimed Will. "Do you mean to say that Baxter would do such a treacherous thing?"

The boy hung his head.

"I can't prove it," he said. "I ain't got no right to say any more."

"Well," said the boy captain, "it looks as if we were in a bad scrape. I am inclined to believe that this is a pre-arranged trap."

Lemuel's face lit up.

"That's right!" he cried, "an' Baxter's the man. But I can't prove it."

"It's my opinion that the best thing we can do is to bivouac here for a time. Then it would be no harm for several of us to go forward on a reconnoitering tour."

"Agreed!" cried Will. "That is certainly our best plan. We are in a scrape and we must find a way out of it."

"You will take me with you, captain?" cried Lemuel, eagerly.

"I cannot promise now," said Will. "Lieutenant Randolph, see that a strong picket line is posted. We must take no chances."

Fred departed to execute this order.

In a short time the Grays were in bivouac. They however made no camp fire for the sudden night indicated their presence to the enemy.

When this was done it was found to be late in the afternoon. The day was rapidly coming to a close.

But this did not deter Will from at once planning his reconnoitering trip. He selected four men, among them being Fred and Corporal Sam Payton.

The Grays were left in the charge of the second Lieutenant. As soon as possible the party set out.

They set out through the forest about at random. Fred carried a compass and set a course for a point which he believed would take them to the banks of the Chickahominy.

Black's Ford had been the scene of a miniature battle but a week before.

Two brigades of Union troops had been driven back by Stuart's cavalry. The town itself had been razed, and not a building was left standing.

But the forces of both sides had later withdrawn, although a small Confederate post had later held out there.

Now, however, it seemed that Union troops were all about the place.

To Will this was an inexplicable state of affairs.

So the little reconnoitering party set out. They had, however, not gone far, when Corporal Payton stopped and bending over examined the path.

"What is this?" he exclaimed. "If I can see straight, it is blood."

"Blood?" exclaimed Will. "What do you mean?"

"Look for yourself," said the corporal.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEAD DISPATCH BEARER.

It needed but a dozen or two of steps for the corporal to speak the truth. On the forest carpeted in the path lay a trail of blood.

Slowly they traced it until the bed of a little rivulet was reached.

Here in the mud beside the brook were footprints. On the bank lay a pistol holster.

On it, there was the inscription, "U. S. A. U. S." It was a Union soldier who had been wounded, and they were trailing him to Black's Ford.

But a bullet, say, fired in the leg, had hit him.

In a clump of bushes his frame lay, stark and stiff in death. His bullet wound in the leg.

Ordinarily this would not have been his punishment. But without medical aid also in the forest, he had doubtless bled his life away.

Will turned him over and saw a bit of paper tucked away a few steps of youth, with frank, open countenance.

"Poor fellow," he said. "Somewhere he has a mother, a home and friends. They will miss him forever."

"That's right, captain," said Corporal Sam Payton. "Let's see if he has any papers."

For a moment all was silent. It seemed something like sacrilege to search the dead soldier.

But Corporal Payton opened the breast of his military vest and felt in the pocket. He took out several articles. These consisted of a pocket-knife, a small trinket box, a locket and a metal charm. The locket held a miniature of a kind, motherly face.

That was all for the moment. But presently Sam drew forth from another pocket a folded paper.

He gave a start.

"It is a military dispatch," he declared. "See, it has the heading of Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac."

In an instant Will was interested.

"A dispatch from McClellan!" he exclaimed. "Let us read it!"

Then he read as follows:

"My dear Ross:—I have your valued communication regarding the proposals of Captain Bell, who, I understand, is a guerrilla. Now if you will remain with your regiment at Black's Ford, I think you will capture the Virginia Grays without much trouble. They are sure to visit Black's Ford to effect a junction with their Colonel English. I will send you word later. I am in constant communication with a certain spy who has promised to place them in our hands. So remain at Black's Ford and await events. I advise you to have nothing to do with Bell. Advise me often how affairs are going."

"(Signed) GEO. B. McCLELLAN, Gen. Comm'dg."

"To Colonel Wilfrid Ross, Tenth Infantry."

It need hardly be said that this astonishing communication was of the deepest interest to Will Prentiss and his four companions.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Sam Payton, "that beats anything I ever heard of. It seems that we have been decoyed here."

"By our own spy—"

"Baxter!"

"He is a traitor!"

For a moment there was silence. Then Will said in a hard tone:

"But we're not captured yet. To be sure we are in a bad box. This is a scrape of the worst sort. But we are going to pull out."

"It's my opinion," said Corporal Sam, "that the sooner we get under bare poles and scud for our lines, the better."

"No," said Will, decisively. "Our only hope is to stay right here."

"Right here?" gasped the corporal.

"Yes."

"But, think of it captain! We shall be surrounded and hemmed down by overwhelming numbers!"

"Well, don't be too sure. I doubt that very much."

"How can we escape it?"

"We can fight at least. We are surrounded anyway. Now our only chance is to stay right here and see it through. We will bury this poor fellow. This dispatch

is a help to us. It lets us know just where we stand. We will now go ahead on our reconnoitering trip."

This was done. The dead soldier was buried. Then the little party crept on.

Watch was kept for signs of a picket. Payton finally whispered:

"We are not far from the river I feel sure. We should run across signs of the enemy soon."

Payton's prediction that they were near the river was verified. They suddenly came out in view of it.

They saw that the banks were high and rocky. The river here almost attains the dignity of a lake.

The little town lay in ruins. The little party of Confederates spent some time in studying the situation.

Not a sign of a foe was to be seen. The town was deserted apparently. It was now rapidly growing dark.

On the opposite side of the river lights were seen. Will studied them a moment and said:

"It is English and his regiment. Doubtless he is waiting for us. I wish we could get over there."

And as they stood there in the dusk they became conscious of a surprising fact.

Just below, on the river bank, the sight of a lantern flashed. It moved to and fro and then disappeared.

"What's that?" asked Payton.

"It means that somebody is down there," said Will. "Probably some denizen of the place who has outlived the panic."

"All the same," said Sam, "I am going down to find and question him. Does anybody else want to go?"

All of the others at once raised their hands in consent. It did not take Will long to make up the company.

All proceeded slowly toward the structure near which the light had flashed. It was only a rude cabin and shielded by the hillside; it was near the water also.

In a few moments they had reached the cabin.

Will stepped up and tapped on the door. There was an odd noise inside and a gruff voice said:

"Who's that?"

"Friends," replied Will, "open the door and let us in."

"Not on your life," replied the inmate with a dry laugh, "go on about your business."

The captain of the Virginia Grays was certainly exceedingly moderate in his course not to order the door beaten down.

But it came a few moments later. The windows had been barred and shuttered. Corporal Sam pulled one of these open.

To his surprise it went all to pieces. The interior of the cabin was wretched in the extreme.

A man had sprung up and grasped a musket. At sight of him a cry went up:

"It's Joe Baxter! Hello, Joe!"

Baxter, the scout, was the lone inmate of the little cabin, with the ruins of the little town all about him. It was a wonder that Baxter had not been captured by some passing band of Union soldiers.

The fellow stood indifferently with folded arms looking at the invaders. He offered no further resistance.

But Will had no intention of wasting further time in compelling Baxter to tell the truth. Deep in his heart Will was inclined to believe the fellow a traitor.

But Baxter glanced curiously at Will and his men, and shrugged his shoulders. He stepped outside quick enough now and said:

"Hello, boys! I'm glad to see ye. How did ye get here?"

"We were guided by that little fellow whom you derided a while ago," replied Will. "He brought us almost here safely."

Baxter's brow darkened.

"He is a cub," he said. "I'll wring his neck for him some day. Well, what can I do for you gentlemen?"

"We want to know why Colonel English is not here with his men to meet us, in accordance with the dispatch you brought us."

Baxter smiled in a cold way.

"So that friend is you, eh? Well, you must be foolish. You ought to know by this time that English is not here."

"So I perceive," said Will. "We have been nicely misled."

"Oh, you look at it that way, eh?" sneered the scout. "I did my duty. I've been trying my hardest to get out of this scrape myself. The old Harry couldn't tell what has brought so many Yankee soldiers into this 'ere region."

"They seem to be plentiful," said Will. "Do you think it is that fact that has prevented English from coming?"

"It ain't nuthin' else."

"Then we're in a scrape. Without reinforcements we'll be wiped out."

Baxter grimly said: "That ain't my fault."

"We have a suspicion that dispatch you brought us was forged. That Mr. Davis never sent it."

A malignant light glittered in his eyes, and he glared at Fred Randolph, who returned his gaze steadily.

"I know where that came from," he said, in a snarling tone. "It's that tanky lieutenant of yours. Well, you can set it down that he lies."

"Take care," said Fred, as he started forward. But Will waved him back.

"This is no time for personal quarrels," he said. "Let us settle the matter at once as to how we are to pull out of this scrape. For pall or o'er it we cast."

"If I had been with ye, I'd never have let ye get so deep in it," said Baxter.

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Will. "It is easy for you to say that now. But why did you not advise us then?"

"For the fact that I didn't know that the Yanks were about here."

Will could see that this was a logical reason and he accepted it. Again a doubt arose in his mind as to whether Baxter was really a traitor or not.

But just at that moment a startling thing happened.

The darkness had grown intense. This had prevented the Grays from seeing a column of dark figures coming up in their rear.

A loud voice called:

"Surrender! You are prisoners! Resist and you will be shot dead!"

It was a Union company and they had claimed to see the gray uniforms in the light of the lantern.

Surrender was as far from Will's intention as could be imagined. He would sooner die.

So he sent up a loud shout:

"To cover, says! Follow me! Open fire on 'em!"

Quick as a flash the quartette sprang behind the cabin. Bullets hissed at against the walls of the cabin.

Baxter seemed to take a part in the defense, loading and firing rapidly. Whether he killed anyone or not could only be guessed.

Quite a sharp little fight followed at close range. But presently the company drew off.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAITOR'S WORK.

The four soldiers in gray knew well that this was their opportunity to act if they would escape.

They had repulsed the attacking party. But they would return. In time the Grays would have to surrender.

So Will began to fall back toward the river. His plan was to cross and join English on the other side.

He believed if he could do this that he could extricate his command from their present dangerous position. For where he had been was by no means an advantageous spot.

So, having repulsed the foe, Will now began actively to plan a way out of the scrape.

He could positively see no way save to cross the river. But how could this be done without a boat?

Will consulted Fred about this and the young lieutenant was unable to make a suggestion.

At this, Baxter, who had heard the conversation, stepped forward.

"Now, I'm goin' ter overlook all the hard things ye've said agin me," he declared. "I can help you out of this scrape. I've got a boat down here on the shore, an' it's a big one, too. It'll carry us all across the river."

To say that Will was delighted would be putting it mild. Fred, however, whispered:

"Look out, Will, or you may be some queer game about it."

"I don't see it," said Will, half with indignation. "He offers to take us out of danger. If he was a traitor he'd turn us over to the foe at once."

"I can't believe that he is sincere," said Fred.

"Don't be foolish, Fred."

"All right. Let him show us the boat. I'll believe it when I see it."

In the last few moments the moon had come out from the clouds and shed silvery radiance over the landscape.

The river lay below. On a hillside opposite were the ruins of a dilapidated building. From behind them could be heard the tramp of men and the clash of arms.

It was plain that reinforcements had arrived and the Union soldiers were going to attack in overwhelming force.

Baxter sprung forward, crying:

"There's only one way. We can't give the Yanks a show for their money. We might as well save ourselves."

"That is right," cried Will. "Lead the way to your boat, Baxter."

"All right, captain," said the man. "I'll soon have ye safe with English."

With this they hastily clambered down over the rocks. Baxter led the way with his lantern.

In another moment he was at the boat. He held the lantern up by the boat and then gave a shrill, ear-piercing whistle.

The result was thrilling.

From the great mass of rock building on the right there showed a score of Union soldiers. Every one had a match, and these were given to Will and his friends.

It was a thrilling moment.

The boy captain was for a moment at a loss what to do.

In an instant Will realized with a kind of the traitor in it all. They were covered by the ranks of the Union soldiers. Baxter, holding up the lantern, pointed to the foe, and cried:

"Now I have my revenge."

The word went far and wide when Will and Fred and Baxter uttered it.

They met with a great surprise. The boat was fastened to the rocks by a very heavy weight. A chain secured it.

For a moment Will was tempted to make resistance. But he soon saw this would be folly.

They were covered by the guns and could easily have been shot dead. Will held up his hands and cried:

"We surrender. We have no desire to fight just now. As for you, you traitor, you will meet your just deserts yet."

Baxter, who had retreated some distance up the rocky shore, swung his lantern and whooped with delight:

"Ha! ha!" he screamed. "It has worked like a charm. At last I will have my revenge. After all these years it has come to me. Ye're prisoners, an' Colonel Ross will order ye shot in the morning for raiders. As for yer comrades, they're already surrounded, an' will have to surrender or be wiped out. Ther'll be no more Virginia Grays! I'm square with ye at last, Fred Randolph."

The fellow's shrieks rose high on the night air, until the officer of the Union company shouted angrily:

"Stop your noise, you fool! Secure the prisoners, boys. Bring down that lantern, Baxter. I want to see their faces."

The Union soldiers had come down from the ruins of the dismantled building. The officer took the lantern from Baxter and coolly flashed its rays into their faces.

When the lantern's glare illumined the face of Fred Randolph, the officer gave an exclamation:

"Hoity toity! Here is the handsome young lieutenant whom Lucretia trapped for us at Lumpkins' place, and who gave us the slip so cleverly."

Fred gave a gasping cry.

"It is Captain Bell," he cried.

"Yes," was the mocking reply. "It is Captain Bell."

The famed Union raider held the lantern up to show his own face. He was grinning in a sardonic way.

"Of course you are surprised," he said, "and I do not wonder. The tables have turned very cleverly. It looks this time as if you would not escape."

"Through the work of a traitor," retorted Fred.

"Well, perhaps so," said Bell, with a light laugh. "We regard Baxter as a loyal Union man, and a very clever spy and scout. He tells me that he has a personal feud with you. He seems to have the best of it at present."

"He is an infamous traitor," cried Will, angrily. "He has enjoyed the confidence of President Davis and all our leaders. This is the way he abuses it for the gratification of personal spite."

"Now that it is all over, I might as well throw a little light upon the matter," said Bell:

"In the first place let me say that the dispatch you received was not sent to you by Jeff Davis. It was written by myself. This point of Black's Ford has been in Union hands since the battle here a few days ago.

"You see, friends, word reached me that a certain enterprising young company of Confederates, known as the Virginia Grays, with consummate egotism, had set out to capture Captain Roy Bell, the raider. When I heard of this amusing project I resolved to have a little fun.

"With the aid of my friend Baxter, here, I have succeeded. Ever since you left your camp upon this enterprise you have been led deeper and deeper into the trap. At any moment I could have sent such overwhelming forces down upon you as to wipe you out.

"But I chose to lead you on step by step. My sister had great amusement with your handsome lieutenant here at Lumpkins. Ha, ha, ha, that is what a pretty face will do."

Fred's face was scarlet and he clenched his hands savagely.

"But all is fair in love and war," resumed Bell, mockingly. "I heard my sister say that she might really have fallen in love with the lieutenant had he possessed a little more polish or chic, which you Southerners lack. I must not omit to mention right here, that her heart was long since promised to a lover in the North who is not quite as pliable and simple of mind as the young Virginian lieutenant."

"But to change the subject, let me say that ere this, your company will be enveloped and forced to surrender. They will be sent one and all to Northern prisons to languish until after the war. As for the officers above the grades of corporal I shall order them shot before noon to-morrow."

Bell's voice grew hard and stern.

"You came here seeking my life," he went on. "It is a case of Greek against Greek. I have won, and I shall claim a victor's vengeance. Take them away and put them under heavy guard. Confine them in the cellar there. See that they have no chance to escape."

"Captain Bell!" called Will, sharply.

"Well, sir?"

"I am Captain Prentiss, of the Virginia Grays. I claim and demand that we be treated as prisoners of war!"

"I claim the right to treat you as I please. You came here seeking my life——"

"You are wrong! We sought your capture that you might be turned over to the justice of a court and a fair trial."

"If you wish I will give you the formality of just such a trial as I would have received," said Bell, in reply. "It is a waste of time."

"Then you propose to murder us?"

"I am more merciful. I do not impose upon you the mockery of a useless trial."

Will saw that argument was of no avail. The raider was determined to carry out his plan.

Certainly it was a terrible scrape for the young officers of the Grays. Their position was humiliating and desperate.

It could not be denied that they had set out to capture Captain Bell. He was to be hunted for his life.

A combination of unfortunate events, hinging upon the treachery of Baxter, had placed them in Bell's power. They could really find no fault.

There seemed but one way, and that was to accept their fate. They were led away into the crumbling arches of the shot and shell shattered building on the river bank.

Here the raiders had improvised means of defense. The debris was piled up into breastworks. The floors had been stepped, giving ingress to the cellar below.

Down into these now the prisoners were led. They were left to find as easy a couch as they could upon the stone floor. Armed guards patrolled the place.

"Well," said Corporal Payton, as he rubbed his chin reflectively, "matters might be worse for us, boys. I wonder if that fellow includes corporals in his list of officers that he says must die?"

"Certainly, he turned the tables on us all right," said Will. "Baxter deceived me absolutely."

"He did me also," said Fred. "One thing sure, I shall never have faith in women again. Lucretia Bell is possessed of more deception than any female I ever met in my life."

"I am inclined to believe now that we walked right into a trap from the first," said Will. "Even Lemuel Lumpkins is an object of distrust."

"They were all against us," groaned Fred. "We were simply easy, that is all. Can you suggest any way of escape?"

"No."

"At any rate," growled Fred, "they might have shaken down a little straw for us. These stones are a pretty hard bed."

Then he gave a thrill. His face grew deadly pale.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER SENTENCE OF DEATH.

Fred dared to look up at that moment, and that which he beheld gave him a distinct shock, inasmuch as it was so unexpected.

Into the cellar there had flitted a vision of female loveliness. Lucretia Bell it was, assuredly as brilliantly beautiful and lively as ever.

Beside her walked a couple of young Union officers, who seemed to regard her with a devotion like that bestowed upon a queen.

"Dear me!" Fred heard her voice, "I am so anxious to see those Southern prisoners. And the dashing young lieutenant who entertained me so highly at Lumpkins that night. What a jolly lark!"

"Here they are, Miss Bell!" said one of the officers simperingly. "Why it's just like going to the zoo, isn't it? Only these animals are a trifle more dangerous."

Miss Bell laughed merrily.

"What a simile," she cried. "You are indeed very witty, Lieutenant Chester. Oh, here they are! And there is the young lieutenant. Do you see? He knows me! He rises to do me honor!"

With mocking ring her laughter smote upon Fred's brain like a hot iron. He had sprung up and stood white faced, with clenched hands.

He had his gaze fixed sternly upon the treacherous siren, who returned it steadily and mockingly.

"Do you come here to mock me?" he said tensely. "I had given you credit for higher womanhood, Lucretia."

"This is a time of war," she said in a direct way. "You are an enemy of my country. You sought my brother's life. All is fair."

"Let it be so," said the young lieutenant, "but do not come here to mock me in my misfortune."

"Look out, Miss Bell, the tiger may jump at you," simpered Lieutenant Chester.

Fred gave the fellow a contemptuous glance. But he could not refrain from gazing again at the treacherous young woman, whose face and manner showed such absolute lack of guile.

It was hard for him to believe her capable of such heartlessness. Yet he must believe his own eyes.

"Yes, your misfortune is great," said Lucretia, more seriously, "but he who lives by the sword must die by the sword. I know what is in your heart. You are a man of high ideas. You trusted me, and now you believe me deceitful."

"I am compelled to say I do!" replied Fred. "My experience warrants it."

She laughed and shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"It is the old story," she said. "Man looks for divinity in woman, nay, demands it, but forgets that she is only mortal, like himself."

Fred bowed coldly.

"That is true," he said, "but the revelation is not a pleasant one."

"The tiger is really quite sociable just now, Miss Bell," again simpered Lieutenant Chester. "He ventures to agree with you upon an opinion."

Fred did not notice this remark, nor indeed did Lucretia. Her manner had seemed to change and a strange expression had come into her eyes.

She lowered her voice:

"You are to be shot at noon, to-morrow," she said.

"So I am told."

"Are you afraid to die?"

"Not with honor. Like any man of pretensions to honor I dread that sort of a death."

"Perhaps my brother will change his mind," said Lucretia, in a strangely significant way, and giving Fred a glance which dazzled him. "We will see what the morrow will bring forth."

"We do not ask for mercy."

"You are over proud."

"That is a privilege."

"Oh, you Southerners amuse me," she laughed bewitchingly, "you take such a serious view of life. Well, I shall be present to-morrow, Lieutenant Randolph, when you face the firing line. I hope you will face it like a man."

She laughed merrily as she walked away. Fred made no reply. He gazed after her with scorn and anger.

He could hardly believe that one so beautiful could be so treacherous and so hard-hearted.

At that moment the love he might once have felt for her, turned to hate.

He turned back to his companions.

Will Prentiss, who had heard all, looked at Fred and said:

"What do you think of her, now?"

"She is a siren," said the young lieutenant. "She is as false as she is beautiful. She would deceive anyone."

"I believe you. Really, I think we owe our present hard straits to her."

"To me," said Fred quickly, "I was a fool to let her deceive me."

"Well, it is too late now to repine. The best we can do is to meet our fate like brave men. I can see but little chance for us."

"Nor I. I feel sure that Bell means to shoot us."

"It is too bad," said Will. "I do not fear death, but I would rather meet it on the field of battle and die with my face to the sun."

Corporal S. J. Payton, who had stood near, heard these remarks. He now drew nearer, and, saluting, said:

"Do you mind if I put in a word about the matter?"

"What is it?" asked Will.

"I just want to say that I don't believe we will be shot." Will and Fred were surprised.

"You don't?"

"No."

"What are your reasons for thinking otherwise?" asked Will.

"Well, I looked closely at the girl and I tell you she is a fraud. Do you understand me? She is not what she seems."

"I think that is right," agreed Fred. "She has the appearance of an angel, but I think she is a she-fiend."

"All right," said Corporal Sam, with a vigorous nod, "think just what you please. We will not be shot to-morrow."

The corporal would give no further explanation. So the matter dropped.

There was little rest for the prisoners.

Without blankets the stone floor was hardly conducive to sleep. They kept as comfortable as possible.

A line of guards paced up and down before them all night long.

Escape was impossible.

It seemed an eternity until morning came. Will Prentiss had not, however, abandoned hope.

It was his fancy that at the last moment rescue might arrive.

How this could be, or from what quarters, he could not venture a guess. Only he had that belief.

With the coming of day a guard brought food to the prisoners.

This consisted simply of hard tack, some strips of salt pork and cold water. They made as good a meal as possible from this.

It was a little while after this that they were taken in charge by a guard of six Union soldiers.

They were marched out of the cellar and once more into the light of day. The sun was shining brightly. Nature had never looked more charming.

Of course the prisoners believed that they were being led out to be shot. Death had never seemed harder.

But they were not placed on the death line yet.

A sergeant of the guard came up briskly and saluted the other sergeant.

"Prisoners are to be taken to the line at one o'clock," he said. "The diacony is fully paid. The graves are dug."

"All right, sir," was the reply.

Will heard this, and his heart sank. He could now see no hope. It seemed certain that they were bound to die.

They sat upon the ground while the six armed guards paced up and down with loaded muskets.

Any attempt to escape would have met with instant death. So the prisoners remained quiet.

Just then Will gave a start. He saw a tall figure approaching. With him was Baxter, the traitor.

Bell, for it was he, smiled in his sardonic way, and said:

"Good morning, captain. Ah, lieutenant, did you enjoy a good night's rest?"

"We cannot thank you for it," said Will, coldly.

"Indeed, I think you ought to be thankful to me for so mercifully allowing you to live until to-day. Some commanders would have ordered you shot long since."

"You are indeed merciful," said Will, with sarcasm. "Shall we look for any further gratuity?"

"Yes," replied Bell, with a smile. "I have put my best marksmen in the firing squad. You will not be permitted to suffer a moment."

"Your humane instincts are abnormal."

"I am glad you appreciate the fact. By the way, I forgot to tell you that my boys obtained the surrender of your company last night. They are at this moment coming into camp, and I shall turn them over to McClellan at a later day."

Will and Fred grew pale.

So the Grays had surrendered. They could hardly believe it. They knew the second lieutenant, Walton, was a fighter, and not one to yield easily.

"You must have had to fight them," said Will.

"Well, yes, I believe we did kill a dozen or more of them," said Bell, carelessly, "but they were wise to give up. We could have wiped them out."

The distant monotone of a drum was heard and just then they saw a line of gray uniforms coming into the camp. Will groaned and said:

"It is the Grays, Fred. Oh, this is a dreadful moment."

The Virginia Grays, without their arms, and surrounded by a powerful guard, came marching into the raiders' camp.

In a few moments they were stationed on the spot with the other prisoners. Will and Fred greeted their comrades.

Nearly every man was wounded in some way. Lieutenant Walton, with tears in his eyes, said:

"I did the best I could, Captain Prentiss. We fought to the last ditch. But they were too strong for us."

"You did right," said Will, approvingly. "It would have been folly to sacrifice life. But, tell me, where is the boy Louie? Was he killed?"

"No," said Walton, with a start, "that is a curious thing. In the very midst of the fight he disappeared. It looked to me as if he had sought his own safety in flight."

"Just what I feared," said Fred. "He was a traitor, too, Will. Ah, we have been the victims of a sharp game all the way through and we are in a bad scrape."

This was beyond dispute.

CHAPTER X.

A CLOSE CALL.

Matters looked dark for the little company of brave lads who had so proudly styled themselves the Virginia Grays.

When the boys heard that Will and Fred were to be shot they were horrified.

"It is too horrible," cried Spotswood. "That is barbarous. You should be treated with courtesy as prisoners of war."

"You must not forget," said Will, "that we are not dealing with an officer of the regular army. Bell is an independent fighter, and the organizer of bands of raiders."

"That is so," agreed the sergeant. "We are completely at his mercy. But what can we do?"

"There is nothing we can do, but die like men," said Will.

All that morning the little band of Confederate prisoners languished in the sun between the lines of guards.

When the sun reached the noon hour and the time appointed for the execution drew near, Bell was seen to emerge from his quarters and speak to the sergeant of the guard.

Then, with several of his officers, he strolled away. The sergeant and his guard came down to the prisoners' line.

They halted and the sergeant read the order:

"Captain Prentiss and Lieutenant Randolph, of the Virginia Grays, sentenced to be shot at twenty paces. Stand forth and fall in line."

There was no use in resisting the order. Will and Fred spoke a few words of farewell to their comrades.

Then they fell in between the guard. The drum tapped and they were marched away. Down the company street they went.

Many of the raiders looked with idle curiosity. A few went out to see the execution.

But in a camp of war, scenes like this fail to arouse much interest. Death is a matter of common sort.

The two young officers were marched to the line. Their hands were bound behind them and the officer asked:

"Do you wish the blindfold?"

"No!" replied Will, and Fred signified the same.

They stood, facing the armed line of men. The muskets

were being loaded. The two doomed men looked about them at the earth and up to the sky.

It seemed to them that it was the last time this was to be, and it was hard indeed.

"Ready!" cried the sergeant of the guard.

Will saw Bell and several of his officers standing some distance to the right.

The Union raider's face wore an expression of exultation. He was about to break up that peerless little company known as the Virginia Grays.

"Ready! Aim!" called the officer.

Will and Fred looked into the muzzles of the gleaming row of musket barrels.

They were pale, but not weak. To the last they would be strong and die unflinchingly, as brave men should.

It was no idle matter to stand upon the brink of a newly-dug grave as they were and face death in this manner.

But neither flinched. The eyes of the men gleamed along the polished barrels. Never had the two young officers been nearer certain death.

But it was not to be.

The fates had decreed that their lives should be spared, and the reprieve came in a most unexpected fashion.

Suddenly a figure, slight and graceful, bounded into the open between the prisoners and the death-dealing muzzles.

It was Lucretia Bell, beautiful and graceful. There was the same air of abandonment about her, the same jovial laugh. It was as if she was taking part in a merry fete instead of a tragic scene of possible death.

"Halt!" she cried in a ringing voice. "I forbid this execution!"

The sergeant of the guard had the word "fire" upon his tongue. It dropped from his lips unspoken.

There stood the line of men with muskets levelled, like dumb automatons, waiting the word to fire, even upon the beautiful creature in their range.

But the sergeant paused. There was a thrilling tableau.

Will and Fred were spellbound. To them it was like a dream.

That this woman, whom they believed to be the cause of their trouble and their worst foe, should now intercede for them, seemed beyond explanation.

But there she stood.

In her hand she flaunted a paper. Captain Bell betrayed amazement and anger.

He strode hastily forward. At the sergeant's order the line of soldiers lowered their muskets.

"What is this, Lucretia?" called Bell, angrily. "What fool game is this? It is no time for joking!"

The young girl laughed.

"Pshaw! you are too serious, brother," she cried. "You don't seem to appreciate this little act of mine introduced into the comedy. I call it very effective."

"Lucretia! are you mad? Stand out of the way. Those men are to be shot."

"They are not to be shot!" she cried with vigor.

"What?"

"I say they are not to be shot!"

Bell rubbed his eyes.

"Have you been taking wine?"

"My senses are clearer than yours," said Lucretia, with a bewitching smile. "I am sorry to say that our game is up, brother. We cannot shoot these men. A higher power has intervened."

"A higher power?"

"Yes!"

"Who is higher in power here than I?"

"Colonel Ross, who has sent this order forbidding the execution."

Bell's face was a study. He grasped the paper and read it.

"To Captain Bell:—I hereby forbid the execution of any prisoners you may hold at the present time. I understand you have in your hands the company of Virginia Grays, of Lee's army. They are a legitimate organization and must be treated as prisoners of war. I am on my way to see you.

"(Signed) WILFRID ROSS, Col. Comm'dg."

Bell crumpled the order in his hand. His eyes were lurid.

"This is your fool work, Lucretia," he hissed. "You're in love with that milk-faced lieutenant, and I know it. You are a traitor to me and I have only to verify it to have you shot also!"

"No!" said the young girl, with a queenly air. "That shall never be. You have not a man in your company who would draw aim at me!"

She spoke with ringing force, and a rippling cheer went up from the guard line.

Bell trembled with impatient rage and fury. He glared at his sister and his fingers worked convulsively.

"Tell me!" he gritted. "You went to Ross to get him to intercede—"

"I did."

"Treachery! You have gone back on me. Do you know what that means? I am your brother."

"I don't care if you are!" she cried. "I can't see these men murdered without a chance for their lives."

"They are our foes."

"No matter. They shall have a fair chance."

"Lucretia, I order you to stand back!"

"What are you going to do?"

"This execution must go on!"

"It shall not!"

The young girl's affectation of joviality was gone now. She was white and resolute and heated. She faced the raider like a Diana.

"You are my sister no longer!" shrieked Bell. "I disown you! I am done with you! Stand away!"

He seized her in his powerful arms and dragged her back. Then he shouted fiercely to the sergeant:

"Fire! Fire! I tell you! Shoot them down! Will you obey?"

But the sergeant stood silent. Not a man in the line raised his musket. Lucretia Bell had won the day.

Insane with fury Bell flung her from him and wrested the musket of the nearest guard from him.

"We'll see!" he cried. "I'll shoot them myself. You shall be up for insubordination, all of you! Take care!"

But there was a clatter of horses' hoofs. Into the open rode a man of commanding presence. With him were two aides.

Lieutenant Colonel Wilfrid Ross was one of McClellan's most trusted officers.

With stern visage he sprang from his saddle and unsheathed his sword.

"What is this, you black, infamous destroyer of homes?" he shouted. "You abuse women, do you? I saw you maltreat this young woman. I have half a mind to prick your thick hide for you."

The colonel flashed his sword before Bell, who instantly stepped back. His face was black with fury. But he saluted and said:

"No man likes to have his authority disputed, especially in such a case as this."

"What is the case?"

"These men are condemned to be shot at twenty paces."

"Who condemned them?"

"I did!"

"Upon what charge?"

"They are enemies of the Confederacy, raiders and guerrillas!"

"Who are they?"

"Captain Prentiss and Lieutenant Randolph, of a company known as the Virginia Grays."

"Sergeant," said Colonel Ross, "you may remove the bonds which bind those two officers. Bring them to me!"

Bell stood sullenly by. Will and Fred were relieved of the bonds which bound their wrists.

They were escorted forward and stood before the Union

colonel. He looked into their handsome young faces and then looked at Bell.

"So you were going to shoot these two boys as if they were spies?" he said scathingly. "You are a disgrace to our army. Bell, I know these young men to be of good families in Richmond. They are honorable and fight fair. The rules of war declare that such shall always be treated as prisoners of war."

"You are making a mistake!" cried Bell. "They are dangerous men. They started out with the avowed purpose of capturing and hanging me."

"They would have committed no serious crime, if they had," said Colonel Ross.

"Captain Prentiss, I used to know your father in the days before the war. Let me take your hand."

"I am pleased to meet Colonel Ross," said Will heartily.

CHAPTER XI.

FRED AND THE NORTHERN GIRL.

"It is fortunate for you that I arrived just as I did," said the colonel.

"Indeed it is. I thought that we had reached the end of our rope."

"I want to assure you that Bell is not a representative type of our officers."

"I am well assured that there are noble men and brave in your service, as well as in ours."

"I assure you, that is so. Now gentlemen, my regiment is here and I shall take charge of this camp for the present. While I have charge of it I shall see that you are treated with the courtesy due your rank. I feel that it is safe to take your parole for the time being. You have the liberty of the camp."

This treatment was most generous and gratifying to the young Confederate officers. They thanked Colonel Ross.

"As for you, Bell," said the colonel, severely, "I place you under arrest for the present, for insubordination and conduct unbecoming an officer."

Bell growled something under his breath and stepped back. Lucretia had disappeared.

This was certainly a turn in affairs for which the boys could not help but feel grateful. They walked back to the camp with Ross, with whom they had a pleasant chat.

"I have no doubt your exchange can be arranged in due time," said the colonel. "In the meantime I trust you will feel at home."

"We thank you, Colonel Ross, and promise you we shall not abuse your generosity," said Will. "But, may I ask you a question?"

"What?"

"When we left Savage's Station after the battle of Fair Oaks, your forces had retired towards Mechanicsville. Are they at that point?"

"They are," replied the colonel. "In fact, a great flank movement against Lee is anticipated. There may be a battle any day."

"That is the very opposite of the position named in the bogus dispatch Baxter brought us," said Will. "He claimed that our forces were making the flank movement."

"That was to deceive you!"

Colonel Ross was now called away to take charge of the organization of his new camp. His regiment was already marching in.

Bell's company would gladly have taken their leave now. But they were not able to do so, for their captain was under arrest.

"Well, Fred," said Will, as they watched the proceedings, "this is quite a change in the programme, is it not?"

"I should say so!" agreed the young lieutenant. "It is all like a dream. But what gives me the greatest shock is the act of Lueretia."

"We owe our lives to her."

"We certainly do. I would like to see her and express my gratitude. Do you know what I think?"

"What?"

"She has from the first been a victim of great misunderstanding."

"How?"

"Well, in the first place, you know that we accused her of sending me into a trap at Lumpkins."

"Yes."

"Well, now upon serious reflection, I don't believe that was her purpose at all. I think that she has played her part all the way through."

"She knew that her brother's men were outside waiting for me to emerge. She believed that there was a chance for me by letting me out the back way."

Will gave a start. "There is a possibility," he said:

"I believe it is true. Then you know she acted very strangely and very unbecoming when she visited us in the cellar."

"I recall it."

"That was not natural conduct. I believe she did that simply to blind her brother and the others. All the while she was planning our rescue."

"Now you call it to my mind, I can see how it was," agreed Will. "Though I did not think of it before. Fred, old man, I congratulate you. I believe that girl loves you, and that she is true."

"I believe she is true," said Fred. "As to the other part, I cannot say. I am anxious to see her."

"Where did she go?"

"I do not know. I fancy she will break with her brother, now."

"If she does, she will need a friend, and I propose to stand such to her. Don't smile, Will! I am a soldier and my life belongs to my country. I can make no rash promises, even to the best girl on earth. At least, not so long as the war lasts."

"The war will last a good while."

"I fear it will. Pardon me, if I leave you and take a look around. If I should see her, I would certainly broach the subject of my gratitude to her."

"If you see her, by all means include me in any expressions of gratitude."

"I will do so."

So they parted. Will went over to chat with his comrades under guard. Fred strolled away through the camp.

The confines of the camp were beyond the ruins of the little town. These were many and varied.

Many of the buildings had been of brick and stone and were quite pretentious. Fred walked about them for some while.

He approached a standing section of brick wall, the wall of a small warehouse. As he drew near a voice smote upon his hearing from beyond the wall.

It was a voice familiar to him. Even before he peered through an aperture he knew who the speaker was.

Captain Roy Bell, without his sword, and dishonored, stood there. At some little distance a couple of guards walked back and forth.

Fred felt a thrill as he saw before him the slight figure of the raider's beautiful sister, Lueretia.

The two faced each other and there seemed a stress of excitement between them. She was calm and very pale.

He was dark and ugly. He glared at her with positive hatred depicted on his face.

"Yes," he gritted, "you spoiled my game. I'll do with you forever! I'll have nothing more to do with you!"

"I am sure I can stand it, Roy, if you can," she said, coolly. "I have been your faithful friend and ally in the past."

"Yes, in the past. But you are now my worst foe."

"You are wrong. I am your best friend," she said.

"Hypocrisy!"

"No, it is the truth."

"Why did you go back on me? You have balled me of my revenge and ruined me. This will go to McClellan, and I can never stand high in his estimation again."

"Roy, it is idle for you and I to discuss this subject. I could not see murder done. Warfare is all right. But needless slaughter is wrong."

"They are foes. I had a right to order them shot."

"Colonel Ross does not think so."

"Hang Colonel Ross. He is an old fool, and more than half Confederate. I shall live to get square with him."

"You are too revengeful, Roy. You must turn over a new leaf. I am going back to mother in Washington. I am afraid we can join forces no longer."

"All right! Go ahead!" snarled Bell. "I am going to wear a general's shoulder straps before I am through. I'll make the whole South tremble before I am through."

The reprobate raider turned and strode savagely away. Nearby a horse was hitched to a post. On its back was a lady's saddle. Upon a horse nearby sat a colored man, who was apparently the servant and escort of the young Northern woman.

Lucretia started to mount her horse. As she was about to do so though, she heard a footstep behind her.

Turning suddenly, she gave a start.

"Lieutenant Randolph!" she exclaimed, and colored to the temples.

"Miss Bell," said Fred, with a deep, full voice, "you are going away?"

"Yes, my brother and I can no longer agree." Her manner changed, and she laughed mirthfully. "When family quarrels darken the horizon there is no balm like separation."

"I think your brother is too harsh with you," said Fred.

"I thank you for your sympathy," she said in a low tone. "My brother has many faults, I have as many, perhaps, but he will not bear with mine."

"He is wrong. Your faults are of the infinitesimal order," cried Fred. "I want to tell you, Miss Bell, that my captain and I owe you our lives, and we are very grateful to you and would gladly know some way to repay the debt."

"I really could not see you shot," she said. Then her eyes danced merrily. "But you thought I meant all the things I said to you in the cellar when you were a prisoner of my brother's?"

"The deuce! you deceived me!" cried Fred. "I feared that I was mistaken in you. But the awakening was like a beautiful transition. I have been happy since."

Her eyes fell.

"And at Luopkin's that night, you thought I entrapped you?"

"How could I know otherwise? I was after you, brother. You might be justified in betraying me."

"Well, I did not," she said candidly. "If you had fol-

lowed my instructions and turned the corner of the house, you would have evaded them."

"Then the fault was not yours, but mine. How nobly you have acted, Miss Lucretia. It was brave of you to step before those loaded guns to save us. Ah, do you think I can ever forget that?"

"I shall not forget you," she said.

He drew nearer and would have taken her in his arms. But she drew back and gave him both her hands.

Her eyes were like stars. She looked into his face and said:

"I shall not forget you, Lieutenant Randolph. I am not deceived in human kind. I know you are brave and noble, and true. I am going back home. We will never meet again—"

"No! No! don't say that—"

"I feel that it is true. These are dark days for the country. War is ravaging the land. You may be killed in battle before peace comes. I may die, for I am going to take up the holy occupation of nurse. I shall consecrate my life to that end. I shall minister to suffering humanity, and their relief shall be my reward."

"You must go back to your company. You are a soldier in the army of the South. Stern duty lies before you. Go and do it—"

"But, Lucretia—"

"Stop! I know what you would say. I know what is in your heart." She clung to his arm and her eyes were tear-wet as she looked up at him. "I know what is in my own heart. But it can never be! It can never be!"

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH IS THE LAST.

Fred Randolph felt an intoxicating sense as the young Northern girl clung to his arm and uttered these words, even though they were words to blast his hopes.

But he would not credit them. He would not for a moment believe they could be true.

The war would soon end. Peace would be declared, North and South would weld new ties.

Human hearts would flow together and love knows no barriers. He would have taken her to his arms again and have made a vow that nothing should take her from him. But she held him back.

"No," she said, "you and I can never be more to each other. I have duties before me which I cannot forsake."

"But— you will drive me mad! We are young, Lucretia! The war will soon be over—when it is over—"

She shook her head.

"Forget it all," she said. "There are reasons for my decision. I shall never marry. I shall devote my life to the cause of human charity, and as a nurse in the field. Good-bye, Lieutenant Randolph," and she laughed lightly and broke away from him.

Fred's brain swam. He made an effort to restrain her, but she eluded him and swung upon her horse.

"If we never meet again, Lieutenant," she cried with her merry laugh, "bon jour! A merry life and a happy wife! I wish you all joy. Good-bye!"

The horse wheeled. She flung him a piquant smile and a last look of her dazzling eyes.

Then she was gone. The thoroughbred vanished in a cut among the rocks, her colored outrider following her.

Fred Randolph stood like one stunned. It was a long time before he could fairly grasp the situation.

Then he drew a deep breath, and smiled.

"She loves me," he reflected, "I saw it in her eyes. She is bâssling me again. She does not mean what she says. It is only another of her whimsical plots."

He walked away with tingling veins. All that day, and for many another day, the beautiful merry face of Lucretia Bell was impressed upon his heart.

But, whether she was in earnest in her declaration that she would never see him again, was never known.

Her prophecy, however, came actually true. Fred was destined never to look upon her face again.

When the war was over he made every research. All that he could find was upon the muster roll of the nurses of the Sanitary Commission the name of Lucretia Bell, a Union nurse, wounded at the battle of Antietam, and died in the service.

But Fred carried to his last day a tender recollection of the most winsome, capricious and beautiful young woman he ever met.

Colonel Ross had firmly established his camp at Black's Ford. He had brought Bell's command into his own and thus added to his force.

Far to the North there were mutterings of battle. It was said that the Union forces were moving upon the Confederates in the neighborhood of Mechanicsville.

The colonel's orders were to hold this ford of the Chickahominy as an important point, for the Confederate retreat was likely to be in this direction, and he might head it off.

The colonel was in close touch with the Union generals and only awaited orders to move to any part of the field. But he did not dream of an attack.

For, as near as could be learned, the Confederate divisions were far away, the nearest resting on Beaver Dam. Thus matters stood.

The Virginia Grays, as prisoners, were still kept under guard.

Colonel Ross was looking for an opportunity to send them to Washington. At present, however, he could not spare the necessary guard.

Will Prentiss and Fred Randolph had the freedom of the camp, and were careful not to abuse the privilege.

Thus matters were when one day an orderly came riding into the encampment.

He had come from headquarters and had a dispatch from General Heintzelman asking that Colonel Ross hold his command ready to march at once to reinforce the army at Mechanicsville.

It is hardly necessary to say that Ross was pleased.

Anything is better to a soldier than utter inaction. The routine of camp duty was becoming irksome.

The Union regiment, therefore, was made ready for a move. The prisoners were now an incubus, as was also the command of Captain Bell.

But, in the latter case, Colonel Ross was easily able to adjust matters. He had held Bell under arrest for what might seem an arbitrary length of time.

So he now released him. The raider rallied his command and marched away.

"I really have no right to hold him longer," said the colonel. "General McClellan can deprive him of his commission later, if he sees fit."

"Now, you had better set us adrift," said Will, jokingly. "We shall be a mill-stone around your neck."

But the colonel laughed.

"I fear you are too valuable," he said, "but if I could ever manage to send you to Washington your exchange might soon be arranged."

The Union troops were waiting every hour for an expected summons from Heintzelman at Mechanicsville. The Grays were under close guard. Will Prentiss was looking into the future with no very optimistic eye.

"Hang it," said Fred, "I think I would rather be under guard than on parole. If I had a chance I could escape."

"Keep cool," said Will, "something will soon turn up."

"I hope so."

"I feel it."

"I am glad you have courage."

"Why shouldn't I? Every moment our forces are augmenting about Richmond. McClellan's campaign is sure to be a failure. He will be driven back. If we are exchanged we can re-organize the Grays. We are still in it."

"You are a hard man to beat, Will."

"I think I am. But I have another reason for my confidence in the future."

Fred looked up in surprise. There was a significance in Will's tone which did not escape him.

"What do you mean?"

"Just this!"

Will drew Fred aside.

"I'll have to tell you a little story," he said. "This morning, early, I took a walk out near the picket line. I was gazing at the country beyond to see if I could see anything of a Confederate flag.

"Suddenly I heard a little shrill whistle in the bushes at the bottom of a little ravine, just below the picket line. At that moment the picket's back was turned. A small missile flew through the air and struck at my feet. It was a small roll of paper wound about a stone. Here it is.

Fred had listened in sheer amazement. As Will handed him the paper he took it and read an inscription thereon in a scrawling hand:

"Deer Captin Prentiss:—Don't you git diskooraged. There is help at hand for you an' you will be reskood in another 24 hours by friends. You kno who I am, but I won't sine my name for fear that someone might git this an' know who I am.

"Yours, A FRIEND."

"P. S.—Longstreet is goin' to smash the Yankees to pieces at wunce."

Fred laughed heartily at the coarse chirography and the wording of the epistle. He looked at Will a moment keenly and then said:

"Do you think it bona fide?"

"Yes," replied Will.

"Who is the writer?"

"Can't you guess?"

Fred looked puzzled. Then like lightning from a clear sky an idea came to him.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Do you think it can really be Lemuel?"

"Lemuel!" said Will, with earnest conviction. "It is his work. You may be sure of that."

"Lemuel is a brick!" cried Fred. "He is a wonder. I can see what he was up to. When the Grays were captured he escaped. He has gone to Longstreet for reinforcements. No doubt that general is sending a brigade down here to effect our rescue."

The assumption seemed altogether logical. The two young Confederate officers were thrilled with delight.

But Fred said:

"On my word, Will, I feel kind of sorry for Colonel Ross. I don't like to see him smashed to pieces."

"Yet it cannot be helped."

"No."

"Such is war."

"That is true."

Of course, the boys kept the matter to themselves. It would have been fatal folly to have told it even to the boys of the company.

But that afternoon Will climbed a hill nearby, and which was used as a post of observation. Colonel Ross and two of his engineers were there.

Suddenly one of the engineers picked up a glass and scrutinized a distant object.

He gave an exclamation:

"By jingo!"

"What's that?" exclaimed Ross, quickly. "What's the matter?"

"Look yonder! Did you ever notice that little rise of land? If I am not mistaken it is a newly erected line of intrenchments."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Ross. "Your eyesight is bad. Our scouts would have reported that long since."

"Ah, but it has gone up since last night. Yes, now you can see! They are running up a Confederate flag."

"Hang me!" laughed the colonel. "This is too much! What are the beggars up to? Who are they?"

"I think I can tell you," said the engineer, with troubled face. "Didn't your scouts report a few sharpshooters to the south of us yesterday?"

"Yes, but they were only guerrillas."

"Don't you believe it. Very likely they were the skirmish line of a large force. I believe the foe are moving in on all sides of us here."

"Are they?" said the colonel confidently. "Then they'll move into trouble. Firing here would warn Heintzelman, and he would come down ten thousand strong. Everyone is waiting for the first attack."

"Well, it is going to come, and here."

The engineer spoke with the confidence of conviction. But Colonel Ross was still skeptical.

He was an officer of the old line, a veteran of the Mexican war, and a tried and true soldier.

He could not believe that the foe would venture to send a large force in to open an attack at Black's when it would expose them to a flank movement and a cut-off by Heintzelman.

He had fully a thousand men with which to defend the ford. But, of course, a whole brigade would drive him.

However, scouts were sent out. It was not many hours before they came running in from all directions.

"The enemy are in force in the west."

"They are moving up from the south."

"They are converging from the north."

"Great Cæsar!" exclaimed the colonel. "Where else can they come from? We must be surrounded!"

Then it dawned upon the brave colonel that it would be necessary to take action at once to defend his position.

Hastily new intrenchments were being thrown up. Of course, all this intelligence was exciting to the Grays.

By night-fall the pickets came in and a firing line was established. The fighting was lively for a time.

The outposts were driven in and the first row of intrenchments taken. It did not take Colonel Ross long to find out that he was greatly outnumbered.

Also, that it was going to be difficult for him to hold his position. It looked as if his only salvation was a night evacuation and retreat across the river.

A consultation of officers finally decided upon this move. The arrival of artillery which was posted upon a hill from which the encampment could be swept, made the move a necessity.

Colonel Ross in this strait sent for Captain Prentiss of the Grays.

"Prentiss," he said, "as you no doubt know, we are in a hard position."

"Yes," replied Will, "I know it."

"If we remain here and defend the ford, we shall be defeated. I have decided to evacuate."

"Well, Colonel Ross, I think your move is a wise one."

"I feel that it is the safest and best move. Under cover of darkness we shall cross the river."

"Will that not be risky if the enemy discover your move in time?"

"We do not mean that they shall discover it. I shall keep a strong rear guard posted, even if I have to sacrifice it."

"I wish you success, Colonel Ross. I really believe it is your best and only move."

"Thank you. Now, Prentiss, what I want to say to you is this: Of course your company of Grays is under guard and prisoners. In this quick retreat it will be impossible to take them with us."

"Ah! I see!"

"Now, we shall leave them behind. In other words they will be relieved by their friends and are once more free. I could take you and your brother officers with us."

"That is your privilege, sir. We respect our parole."

"While I know that it is not military spirit not to do so, still I am not going to do so—on one condition."

"Colonel Ross, I appreciate your kindness," said Will. "What is the condition?"

"While we are evacuating you are to hold your men in check. For one hour after the evacuation of the town you

will give them, the foe, no intimation of our mode of retreat."

Will held out his hand.

"I can afford to be as generous as you, Colonel Ross," he cried. "I agree to your terms most heartily."

"Very good! My men will move out of Black's Ford to-night."

Some hours later the little regiment of Union troops forded the river and drew back into the interior upon the heights. Here they were reinforced and were able to make a strong stand.

But General Longstreet did not pursue them. He was content with driving them back across the river, and securing the release of the Grays.

It is hardly necessary to say that the Grays were delighted at their escape from the trap into which they had been led by a traitor.

Lemuel Lumpkins was in the van when Longstreet's men entered Black's Ford and the reception he was given by the Grays was a wildly joyful one.

The little country boy was overwhelmed with praise, and Will at once promoted him to the position of corporal. This made him very happy.

The Grays had emerged from their bad scrape very cleverly. They were once more ready for duty.

But one and all vowed that if they ever caught Baxter they would make short work of him. The traitor met his fate a short while later, however, in a tavern brawl, receiving a wound from which he died.

Captain Bell went once more upon the road as a raider and guerrilla. But he was caught and hanged some months later by a detachment of Stuart's cavalry. So ended his lurid career.

We have already depicted the fate of his beautiful sister, Lucretia.

The Grays returned to headquarters near Richmond, and quickly reorganized in time to take part in the Seven Days' Battle before Richmond, of which we will write in another number.

THE END.

Read "AT FORT DONELSON; OR THE BOYS IN BLUE'S GREAT CHARGE," which will be the next number (13) of "Blue and Gray Weekly."

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